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ALSTON CRUCIS.

VOL III.

ALSTON CRUCIS

BY

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'DAGMAR,' 'THE LAST OF THE FENWICKES,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CONTENTS
OF
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CHAPTER	PAGE
I. IN THE MARKET PLACE	1
II. THORNTON HARRIS'S HOUSEKEEPER	45
III. COME !	84
IV. HE HAS BEATEN ME AFTER ALL	116
V. CONFESSION	173
VI. A CONFESSION	204
VII. IN THE GARDEN	240

ALSTON CRUCIS.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE MARKET-PLACE.

—At first view
I felt quite sure that God had set
Himself to Satan : who would spend
A minute's mistrust on the end ?
R. BROWNING.

THE next day was polling-day—the ballot as yet only a dream of a few enthusiastic politicians. Consequently that day had been a ‘weather-breeder’ in more senses than one, and peaceable townsfolk in Colgrave arose the next morning with heavy hearts, wishing that it were ‘evening and all well.’

The rival candidates would have given something to know which of them would write M.P. after his name when the day was over.

And Harold, to whom that day's work might mean more than to any or all of them, arose with his mind made up, feeling more nearly light-hearted than he had felt since his troubles began, and forthwith set himself to mature his plans, and then to sow dissension and work mischief.

The non-voters, as Mr. Ravenstone had said, were more turbulent and more excited about the chances of the election than those who really had a part and lot in the matter.

They had, most of them, left their work for the occasion, and were streaming about the streets or standing round the polling-booths, on the look-out for amusement—

the more violent the better. And among them went Harold and his allies, especially among those of the Tory persuasion ; trying to turn their general indignation against the opposite party into a special prepossession against Thornton Harris, who had been very prominent during the last day or two in the Radical committee-rooms.

There was evidence enough presently that they were succeeding, to a certain extent. Harris was pelted, though only with harmless missiles, on one or two occasions when he was seen crossing the market-place ; and an attempt was made to break the windows of his new office—promptly discouraged by Harold, and quashed by the police.

Two or three rough-and-tumble fights took place, in all good-humour, at various

street corners, to which Harold, acting as recognised captain of a good many of the most desperate characters there, contrived to put a stop as soon as they came to his knowledge.

His wild followers might get as excited as they pleased ; but he did not want them to work off their excitement, or in any-way to bring down upon them armed interference, until the proper time should come—until twilight should have begun to fall, and all things should be in readiness.

If Elizabeth Walrond had seen her hero's face now, she would hardly have recognised it, so changed it was. It must be confessed that whatever there might be of heroic in Harold's soul was just now altogether in abeyance ; the longing for revenge—and a straightforward, brutally-simple revenge at that—was uppermost,

and had, as it seemed, quenched all else.

His plan was not to be left to chance any more, but waking early that morning he had decided that the odds against him were too great to make it worth while to wait and to possess his soul in patience, that he would strike his blow that very day.

The only doubt was as to what was to become of himself afterwards. The Hernes and their friends were pledged to protect his retreat, and to get him off out of the town in safety. Afterwards, they had holes and corners, and hiding-places in plenty; it would be a matter of no difficulty to dodge the police, at any rate for a time. And beyond that he had no views whatever, and was in no mood to entertain any. What did it matter, if only his

deep thirst for vengeance had first been satisfied?

It was towards middle-day, as Harold was passing through one of the slums of Colgrave, a narrow court which was an unrecognised short cut between two of the principal streets, that he came suddenly upon some one for whom he had been looking out for some weeks, and whom he had almost ceased to expect to see on this side of the water.

Joe Herne's curious eyes made him unmistakable anywhere, let him attempt to disguise himself as he might. He was disguised now, by a green shade over one of them, and a handkerchief muffled over the lower part of his face; but he did not seem to be hiding himself from Harold's observation. On the contrary, he came eagerly forward, lifting his hand with a

signal whose meaning Harold had learnt long before.

‘You here?’ said Harold, sharply. ‘I’ve been looking for you this long while past.’

‘I don’t know about that,’ answered the gipsy. ‘I’ve been looking for you, but you went to the tribe, and you might have known you wouldn’t find me with them. I daren’t face Uncle Gabe, and the rest.’

‘Well, we did make something of a mess of it between us,’ went on Harold, with a bitter lightness. ‘And the reward I promised you and Will is not like to be forthcoming, I’m afraid. All the same, I owe you something; for I believe you did your best to speak out and tell the truth. Perhaps it wasn’t your fault altogether that it seemed to come with such a very ill

grace. Here's part, at any rate, of what I owe you.'

Joe Herne backed away from his extended hand, though looking at it somewhat longingly.

'Nay,' he said, 'not while I see you like one of us! When you're back at Crucis again you may offer me that, and I'll not say nay. But I've not forgotten what you did for me that night at Lawyer Harris's, and I've something to pay for that yet. There was something I didn't tell you before—I don't know if it would have made any difference if the magistrates had known of it—and there's another matter I've got to know of since, and Will Herne knows it better than me, that might come in useful if you could work it.'

Harold was only half listening to the

confession of his strange ally. He had given up now all idea of working out his revenge by the help of the law; and, even if he had not, he had little belief in the possibility of proving anything that Joe Herne could tell him. And before the other had done speaking his ear was caught by another sound—a light, quick step on the pavement of the alley—a voice that seemed strangely familiar.

A hand was laid on his arm, and, turning, he found himself confronted by his half-brother, Phil, who looked for a moment half-doubtfully up into his face, then grasped him by both hands with a cry of triumph.

‘I knew I should find you!’ cried the boy, almost reproachfully. ‘Oh, Harry, why did you go away?’

Harold laid his hands on the youngster’s

shoulders, and half shook him, looking down upon him tenderly enough, nevertheless.

‘Lad, what brings you here?’ he said. ‘I heard you were gone to school. And you know well enough why I went.’

‘You promised you would tell me, yourself, before you went, if you had to go. And if you had I should have told you then that I didn’t believe a word of it, and that if it was all true it shouldn’t make one atom of difference. But you never gave me a chance to speak, so I had to come and find you.’

‘Run away from school?’ asked the elder brother, severely.

‘I left school soon after I got there,’ responded Phil, with dignity. ‘I wrote a note to old Henderson, a very polite and proper note, and he got it, I suppose, this

morning. And my chum, Dalton, helped me to get off.'

Harold half laughed, and looked round to see what had become of his late companion. He was gone, and the alley almost deserted. The noise going on in the market-place had drawn every able-bodied inhabitant out into the open to see the fun.

'And how did you contrive to find me, after all?' he asked, not a little put out, yet softened also by the unreasoning fidelity of the boy he had always loved.

'I spoke to the grandmother just before I left home, and she told me that you would be here to-day, and where to find some of the Hernes, and said they would tell me where to find you.'

'Humph! I never told her. Lucky for her, she didn't live a hundred years ago;

she'd have been burnt to a certainty. And what am I to do with you now you are here?'

Phil looked a little disconcerted. Perhaps he had thought that if he could once find his brother the relations between them would be somewhat reversed for the time, and it would be for him to settle what they were both to do.

'I thought—I hoped—you would come home with me,' he faltered, looking down.

'Silly fellow!' said Harold, with another little shake. 'Did you think I left home because I was afraid that you would turn me out? or that I should be here if I had not something that I must do?'

'Let me help you to do it!'

'No, my dear old lad. The only thing you can do for me is to go back to school, and stick to your work, and try to be a

credit to our father's name—for it will all rest now with you.'

'Won't you come home, then, when you have done what you have to do?'

'I don't know! Probably not. The chances are that I shall never see Crucis again.'

The boy's eyes grew wide with consternation; and he clutched his brother by the arm, holding him fast.

'What do you mean? Why should you go away for always? It isn't true! Uncle Bolingbroke said himself that perhaps it couldn't be proved. And if it was we shouldn't love you the less. You wouldn't have any right to go and leave us.'

'Oh! Phil, Phil,' said Harold, very sadly. 'Don't you see that it was to spare us both all this that I made a moon-

light flitting, and never said good-bye to you?’

‘I—Did you mean, then, never to see me again?’

‘I meant nothing. But I think Fate will have it so. I must do what I have to do; and that will hardly agree with Crucis and respectability.’

‘Then I won’t be respectable either. I’ve found you, and I’ll stick to you. They can’t make me take your place, even if you won’t come back and take it yourself.’

Something in the boy’s pleading eyes reminded Harold of Elizabeth; and the remembrance provoked and yet touched him. It was pretty, and it was absurd, the way these innocent creatures understood, and yet failed to understand him; and linked their white, weak hands to

hold him from his purpose ! Elizabeth had wrung a foolish promise out of him ; but with Phil, at least, he could be master.

‘ Phil, this is childish talk ! ’ he said at last, gently and gravely enough. ‘ I can’t have you with me on the way I’m going. I don’t choose even to tell you what I have to do. By-and-by you will hear, perhaps, and understand. And then you will know that it was just because we were always good friends and brothers that I would not let you come with me. You must keep steady, and straight, and do all that I meant to do ; for I have only one more card to play—and then I must go under. The only way that you could make things worse for me and for everyone, would be by insisting on going under too.’

‘ Father cared for you most,’ said Phil,

half-sobbing; clinging so close to his brother's arm that his face was hidden. 'It was all right, I didn't mind, but I always knew he did. And now it will be all wrong. I couldn't bear to think he knew I had taken your place.'

'I think he knew before. And he would have had us both do what was right. Come! Phil; it's nothing to fret about. I was always half a gipsy, you know! I daresay I shall soon forget that ever I was Malreward of Crucis. And you and Bolingbroke must clear his name if I fail.'

'I'll do my best. But I don't seem to care about it if it isn't your name too.'

'You'll care, fast enough, when once you are a man. And now, Phil, my lad, do you know what you are going to do? You are going down to the station, and back to school by the next train; and I

shall write a line to your master. As far as he knows I am still Malreward, and your guardian. I shall say that you have only been with me, and probably you won't get into more of a row than you ought to expect and put up with.'

'Oh! what does it matter? Do you think I care for anything that Henderson can do to me? But, Harry, don't send me away from you just now. I know something dreadful is going to happen. The Hernes said there was going to be fighting. Let me stay with you, just for to-day.'

Again Harold laid his hands on the boy's shoulders, and looked steadily down into his eyes.

'Considering all things,' he said, 'I think you are not going to refuse the last thing, perhaps, that I shall ever ask of

you. If you did, it would make not much practical difference, for I could not let you stay. But you won't refuse, Phil?'

His sweet gipsy voice was as inexorable as his face, into which Phil looked up so eagerly, searching it in vain for any sign of yielding.

'We are brothers, anyhow!' cried the boy, his eyes filling with angry tears. 'You make me a coward when you make me turn my back on you in trouble. My father would never have said that was right! Well! I will go quietly, as you say, if you will promise me one thing. Promise me that I shall see you again, once at any rate, before you go away. Come and see me at school, or send for me anywhere in the world, and I'll come. But I have a right to see you again.'

Oh! these children! They could hardly

be in conspiracy against him; and yet it almost seemed like it. Harold laughed, although he was half-angry; and he yielded, though it was against his will, like one overmastered by some spell.

‘I promise! It may be awkward, but I promise! I don’t know that anything will matter much, after to-day. And now, there’s no one looking! give me a kiss, lad, and be gone.’

The boy said nothing, only clung to him for a moment, choking down a great sob, and then turned away.

‘I shall write to Henderson to-night; tell him so as soon as you get in,’ said Harold, as they parted; while Phil made a little impatient gesture, as if that were beside the mark, and looked round for one last word.

‘This isn’t good-bye, after all. You’ve

promised, remember,' and with that he began to run down the alley, and in a moment was out of sight.

With one lingering, wistful look after him, Harold hurried away in the opposite direction; first, to look for Joe Herne, whose interrupted communication now seemed to him of more possible importance; but whom he failed for the present to find.

Next he turned into a stationer's shop, and bought a sheet of paper and an envelope from the pretty girl behind the counter, who evidently wondered what the gipsy wanted with it. She wondered more when he proceeded, in his own natural manner, to ask for a pen and ink, and, leaning on the counter, wrote a letter in what she could not fail to perceive, even upside down, to be a gentleman's hand.

‘The election,’ in her mind, however, accounted for all eccentricities, and Harold had no time to be amused at the contrast between his circumstances and the tone of his note to the head of his brother’s school; though it did occur to him that this was probably the last letter that he should ever sign as Harold Malreward.

‘That’s over!’ he said to himself, with a sigh, as he dropped the letter into the box. ‘The last thing I shall ever do for the lad; my abdication as his guardian; if old Henderson did but know it. And now to go to and fro, and walk up and down, and set about the devil’s work again! It can hardly be that, though, for if this isn’t casting out Satan I don’t know what is, and they say he never does that.’

As evening drew on, the streets of Col-

grave naturally grew more crowded. A considerable part of the population had been at work, somehow or other, though most of the colliers had taken a holiday; and those who had been working now poured into the market-place, eager for their share of the excitement.

Drenching rain in the morning had a little damped their enthusiasm, but it had ceased to fall, and the streets were tolerably dry, though the sky was stormy and gusts of wind sometimes drowned the voices of such speakers as attempted to hold forth in the open air.

There was a tendency to quarrelling amongst the mob, quite apart from the animus for which Harold and his friends were responsible. Mr. Norton and his allies, Thornton Harris amongst the number, had not been unwilling to stir up the

worst passions of their adherents ; and had found, as many have done before them, such spirits easier to raise than to control.

Mr. Ravenstone, the vicar, had not been content merely to stand aloof and see his predictions verified. While disclaiming all interest in politics, as such, his tall figure and commanding face had been often seen throughout the day, now here and now there, and sometimes seeming almost ubiquitous.

Wrangling crowds he broke up by directing the police to their duty ; single combats he put an end to by the unaided force of his own prestige and authoritative voice, sometimes by the power of his own strong hand. Promising converts of his own he fetched out of public-houses, where an amount of drinking was going on that looked ill for

some at least of the free and independent electors ; and more than one man who felt his day's doings not altogether to his credit, slunk home through by-ways as he saw the vicar's spare form bearing down upon him through the press.

What Mr. Ravenstone did his curates also were expected to do. Harold, standing idly in the outskirts of a crowd, biding his time, caught sight of John Walrond, ' either very valiant or very much afeard,' possibly both, making his way through the throng with the evident intention of speaking to the voluble and revolutionary individual in the centre of it, who had drawn the multitude together by haranguing them in very questionable language, from a stool, which he carried about with him.

It was very clear to Harold that the young man was much out of place ; also

that he would certainly meet with rudeness ; possibly with something worse. And he was Elizabeth's brother. Quietly Harold edged after him, resolved that if anything untoward did happen in consequence of his well-meant interference the young clergyman should at any rate find an unexpected ally at his back.

The speaker had, however, finished all he wanted to say ; and before Harold could follow closely enough to catch John Walrond's low-voiced, precisely-worded remonstrance, the man whom he addressed had answered by a joke too broad for repetition, aimed at ' parsons ' in general ; and, in the midst of the roar of coarse laughter that followed, jumped off his stool, picked it up, and pushed his way through the crowd in search of a fresh audience.

The only result, therefore, of Harold's

movement was that John Walrond, turning back upon his own steps, met him face to face, so close that it was impossible to avoid a recognition.

‘ Mr. Malreward !’ he exclaimed, in incredulous astonishment.

‘ No !’ answered Harold, looking at him with a strange, hard smile. ‘ Mr. Malreward could have no business here ! But I have business, and must be attending to it. Good-evening, Mr. Walrond.’

He was about to slip away into the throng, but the other put out a hand and caught him by the arm.

‘ Wait a moment, for heaven’s sake. My father, many of your friends, have been inquiring after you in vain. Why do you not go to them, instead of being here in this unworthy disguise ?’

‘ I believe you mean kindly, but I have

no time to discuss the matter,' answered Harold, hurriedly. 'I wear no disguise, worthy or unworthy; but the proper dress of my class. And those kind friends of whom you speak can do nothing for me that I could accept at their hands. I am not ungrateful to you or them, and in return I give you one word of advice. Go home, and keep out of this hurly-burly. There will be more mischief stirring presently than you or your vicar can cope with, and you will only put yourself in danger to no purpose.'

'I must be about my Master's business,' answered John Walrond firmly, his face a shade paler, 'and I must entreat of you—'

'Hush!' said Harold, holding up his hand and listening intently to a fresh outburst of shouts that suddenly rose above the general uproar.

They were standing close to where one of the main streets debouched into the market-place, and in that wider space the crowd swayed and clamoured like the troubled sea that cannot rest. It was on the farther side that the new hubbub had arisen, and John could distinguish nothing beyond an access of noise, but it seemed as though Harold knew or could guess the meaning of the cries.

‘Fools!’ he cried, sharply; ‘they have begun too soon!’—and flung himself into the press, shouldering those who stood in his way to right and left, while almost simultaneously a woman close by shrieked, ‘They’re killing some one over yonder!’

A chorus of questions, chiefly in shrill feminine voices, which no one answered, added to the general confusion. Those in the midst of the crowd—or some of

them, at least—seemed to understand what was going on, for all faces looked one way, stones and sticks began to fly, and the shouts began to gather some definite meaning and coherence.

‘ Who killed Sam Crofton ? ’ ‘ Where’s his partner’s money ? ’ ‘ Thief ! ’ ‘ Murderer ! ’ ‘ Throw him down here ! ’ ‘ Serve him as he served Sam Crofton ! ’ etc.

And through it all Harold pushed forward, cleaving the throng like a racing yacht cleaving the waves ; and in his wake came John Walrond, profiting by the gaps his passage left, and with his prim, delicate features set like a flint.

Things were not falling out exactly as Harold had intended. They rarely do when a man has to work with many tools. Somewhat later in the evening a stranger was to have sought out Thornton Harris at

the committee-rooms, or anywhere else that he might happen to be, and to have beguiled him out into the market-place, on pretext of some one wanting to speak to him. Then Harold was to have been on the spot, with a sufficient number of allies—instructed not to interfere between him and his enemy, but to make and keep a ring round them, and give to each a fair field and no favour—and then—Well! it might all come to pass as it had been planned, still, though some one had anticipated matters. Harris had been seen crossing the market-place on some errand of his own, at a time when most of the adherents of his party were engaged elsewhere, and the fire which had been fanned all day had leaped at once into flame.

He was bold enough, villain though he might be. He had gained the steps which

led to a small platform which surrounded the town pump, and from that vantage ground looked down upon the yelling and hooting mob. Two or three others shared it with him, but they happened to be neutral, or at any rate not disposed to yield to the repeated cries of ‘Throw him down!’ And the populace in general merely howled and bayed, like a pack of dogs round some animal that they hardly know how to attack—kept in check perhaps by the muzzle of a revolver that gleamed under the man’s hand—not brandished threateningly, but plainly in readiness.

He could hardly believe the mob in earnest; and indeed some of them were not, at first, while there were plenty on the outskirts of the crowd who would have felt bound to take his part, if only they could have got at him.

But missiles of all sorts came flying through the air; and the blood-hunger was rapidly rising in those fierce, untamed souls, while at the very foot of the steps by now was one who was in deadly earnest enough!

Harold glanced around and saw a face or two that he knew; Hernes enough to keep off for the moment any who might attempt to come between him and his revenge.

The time was come, then!—and he leaped on to the platform with a bound, caring no more for the revolver that Harris held than if it had been a rush.

Instantly—almost instinctively—the other raised it, and as instantly Harold wrested it from his hand, flung it on the ground, and put his foot upon it. So swiftly was the thing done that those nearest them

hardly saw what had happened. And at that moment John Walrond's pale face appeared at Harold's elbow, and his voice, with something in its tones that recalled his sister's, panted out, 'How are we—to save him?'

For one moment Thornton Harris had tasted the bitterness of death, as he recognised his enemy, even by the fierce grace of that cat-like spring; and with his keen brain realised the fitness of time and place and surroundings for some desperate deed of vengeance.

But in spite of the surprise that at the instant had palsied his hand—in spite of his wrath at his own weakness which had left him thus weaponless—he laughed aloud at John Walrond's question, and the look of concern on his bewildered face.

Harold was in no laughing humour,

though for the moment, in his astonishment at seeing who had followed him, he failed to see all that this meant.

‘What are you doing here?’ he said, sharply. ‘Didn’t I warn you——’

Two or three roughs sprang up the steps; goaded on, perhaps, by the pushes of those close to them, and the shouts that every moment grew more angry. One of them Harris knocked back again amongst his fellows below; one Harold brushed down as if he had been an intrusive insect, and one was pulled back by a gipsy-looking fellow on the lowest step, who had been shouting among the loudest.

‘Go down!’ went on Harold, in an almost savage undertone, as if there had been no interruption. ‘You cannot save him, I tell you; you can do no good here!’

There was another incursion from below.

How many assailants Harris had to repulse Harold had no leisure to see, for John Walrond, boldly interposing his slight person between them and the object of their wrath, got a handful of mud full in his face, and a rough hand laid upon his clerical coat that would certainly have torn it from top to bottom, if nothing worse, but for Harold's prompt interference.

‘Get down!’ he repeated, still more emphatically. ‘Here! by this corner. Stick to that fellow there; he’ll see you safe,’ and he pointed to the gipsy, who was still bawling for the blood of Crofton’s murderer.

‘I can’t!’ gasped the young clergyman. ‘They will kill him! It is my duty to help you to protect him—to prevent crime.’

It had all passed in far less time than it takes to tell of it, but in such moments

thought is swifter than lightning. Harold saw it all, even while he instinctively drew John Walrond out of the way of a huge cabbage-stalk that came flying at their heads ; and Thornton Harris turned and looked at them both with the strangest smile of mockery and comprehension.

All the police in the town—all the king's horses and all the king's men—could not have snatched his revenge from him at that moment. But the son of his father's old friend—Elizabeth's brother—might do it !

‘ You don't know what you are meddling in,’ he said, in a fierce keen whisper that was audible through the uproar to John Walrond alone. ‘ You can't save him ! Do you want to die with him ? Go ! while there's time !’

Driven on by pressure from those be-

hind, another wave of that raging human sea broke over their little island of safety, the rocky walls of which were the three stone steps around its base. Small chance for any of them, it seemed, if once they should be swept from it.

John had no time to answer in words, but his actions spoke for him. Clinging to the pump with one arm, he flung the other round Harris, who had just received a blow on the head that half-stunned him for the moment. Both would have been torn from that friendly shelter, but that Harold instinctively struck out right and left; marking one or two most rascally countenances while he thus gained a moment's time to think. More than a moment it could not be, but that was enough.

He was baulked, for this time! The

young man was his father's own son, after all, and would die sooner than turn his back on his duty. And since Harold could not let him be killed, why——

‘I must save them both!’ he said to himself, with a great oath, half rage, half unwilling admiration; ‘and the devil must wait for his due; though I can promise him this man, yet!’

The thought was barely formed before he lifted to his lips a whistle that hung from his neck, and a long clear call rang above the tumult. Three or four, who had seemed the foremost of the rioters, pressed nearer still at the sound; and Harold took them all in with one swift glance.

‘You shall save him!’ he said to John Walrond, ‘if you do what I tell you. Keep hold of his arm! This way!’

He seized Harris's other arm, while he,

still confused by the blow and hardly aware of what was passing, yielded unquestioningly. Down the steps, on the side nearest the houses, they stumbled all three, falling almost against the gipsy who had been posted all the while at that corner, and who seemed to receive them with blows, but, in reality, hustled them through the throng, assisted by two or three more.

The crowd on the farther side of the pump hardly knew what had happened, as yet ; and those nearer at hand rained blows too much at random to do much harm, at least at first. Harold got a blow on the left arm that numbed it from the wrist to the shoulder, and John Walrond's face was scratched by an infuriated unsexed woman, against whom he would not lift a hand, while his coat was torn nearly off his back. Thornton Harris, between them,

got off better, though the blood was streaming down his face from the blow he had had already.

It was all over in a moment. Close at hand was one of the numerous narrow alleys that opened into the market-place, and at the mouth of it two men were lounging, who pricked up their ears and stood at attention at the sound of Harold's whistle. Astonished they might be at the sight of the three who struggled towards them through the throng, but none the less did they make way, and keep the way, and cover the retreat of the fugitives. Harold whistled again, more softly, and a door a little way down the alley opened to receive them almost before they reached it. It closed behind them, and they crossed a narrow passage and found themselves in a small empty room, while the shouts in

the market-place sounded dulled and far away, through two or three blocks of masonry.

The preparations made for Harold's escape were serving a purpose of which he and those who helped him had little dreamed.

Thornton Harris dropped into a chair, still dizzy and bewildered, but looking round him with eyes that were gradually recovering their wonted clear, cold powers of vision. John Walrond leaned against the table, physically almost more confused, though he had not had a blow on the head, but mentally less obfuscated. To him the affair was simply a gallant rescue, in which he had taken a part, and he was surprised at and pleased with himself, though he did not exaggerate his own share in the glory. And Harold looked at them both with a

very bitter smile, almost a sneer—as much at himself as at them.

‘Mr. Walrond, I congratulate you,’ he said: ‘you have done more than you know of. Mr. Harris, you should be congratulated too, perhaps; but I think we shall meet again some day.’

He had meant to say more, possibly, but turned away in a sudden access of impatience, opened the door, and called down the passage some words that neither of the others understood. A woman instantly answered the summons, decently dressed after the ordinary fashion of a working-woman, with a swarthy, handsome face, and thick, wavy hair.

‘Bring these gentlemen some water and towels,’ he said; ‘and if you have anything that can serve as a bandage—you know how to bind up a broken head,

Maggie ! When they are ready to go, let them out by the back way. You will see me again before long.'

He paused a moment, looking again towards the others, who, perhaps, by now had recovered themselves enough to have spoken, if they had not been literally dumb-founded.

'Good-bye, Mr. Walrond. May I ask you not to talk about this proceeding in the town? Mr. Harris, *au revoir!* Mention what you like, and do your worst !'

He laughed, and swung out at the door before John Walrond could utter the remonstrance and entreaty that trembled on his tongue.

An outer door, apparently that by which they had entered, closed behind him with a bang, and the two were left to gaze upon one another—companions in adventure as

widely differing and as uncongenial as could have been found that day anywhere in the three kingdoms.

CHAPTER II.

THORNTON HARRIS'S HOUSEKEEPER.

Return, they cry, ere yet your day
Set, and the sky grow stern.
Return, strayed souls, while yet ye may
Return.

A. C. SWINBURNE.

‘AND,’ said John Walrond, ‘the woman let us out by a back way, so that Mr. Harris reached his committee-rooms without being caught sight of by the crowd, and I went to join the vicar. But I said nothing to him about the affair. I was too much at a loss what to think of it; and am so still.’

The junior curate of Colgrave was spending a day at home, about a fortnight after the election; and sitting with his father in what Harold had once called 'the justice-room of the Rev. George Walrond, J.P.'

Mr. Walrond was sitting in his worn leather-covered arm-chair, bending forward, with the liveliest interest in his ruddy, eagle face. And standing beside the window, her slight figure half-hidden by the curtain, Elizabeth held her still keener interest in check, owning now in her proud, maidenly heart that she loved this man whom father and brother were so discussing, and finding it tax all her powers to listen calmly.

Life and death! It meant more than life and death—this story that John told so tamely! The life of a soul, the death-struggle of a horrible temptation—that

was what it meant, if she read aright the riddle that John could not guess. But she would have given much for fuller details, for clearer knowledge, and could not trust her voice to ask a single question.

‘I cannot doubt that Mr. Malreward meant to save Harris from the first,’ went on John Walrond, slowly. ‘He fought his way to his side at all risks. I could never have reached the place if he had not gone before me. But there was something most threatening in his tone afterwards, and at the time something that seemed like a sudden change of purpose. And what could have been the meaning of his words to me, that I “had done more than I knew”?’

‘I can guess!’ answered his father, with a smile, yet very seriously. ‘Perhaps I have more of the old Adam in me than

you have, and, consequently, more comprehension of that poor lad's state of mind. Depend upon it, he meant to *kill* Harris, not to save him; and time, and place—and possibly accomplices—were all chosen for the purpose.'

'But, if he could have intended such a thing, why should he not have done it, after all?' asked the young man, in incredulous horror.

'You were there! And you "did more than you knew,"' answered the rector, with a touch of grave satisfaction in his voice that made his son blush like a girl. Theoretically, John Walrond might be forced to look upon his father as little better than one of the unregenerate; but practically he would rather have been praised by him than by anyone else in this world.

As for Elizabeth, those three words, 'and possibly accomplices,' had grated terribly on her ears. But she could not speak out, could not answer proudly for Harold that he would have scorned to enlist accomplices against a single man, however much his enemy. She had no reason to show for her confidence, and maidenly 'shamefastness' kept her silent.

'I wish I knew where he has gone, and what has become of him since that day,' went on John Walrond, after a moment's silence.

'Have you seen and heard nothing of him?' asked his father.

'Nothing. I called at that house again the next day, but the gipsy woman was gone. The people of the house said that she and her people had only been lodging

there for a few days, and that they knew nothing of them beyond the fact that they paid their way. I did not like to mention Mr. Malreward's name, but I described him to them, and they declared—I fear untruthfully—that no such person had been seen about their house by them, or anyone to whom they spoke on the subject.'

'And Thornton Harris?' asked the rector, somewhat impatiently. 'Has he said nothing to you about the mystery?'

'Not a word! He has hardly been in Colgrave since the election. That was partly the reason of my coming here to-day: to see if you would think well to call upon him, as his pastor, and see if he can throw any light upon the matter, or enable Mr. Malreward's friends to communicate with him.'

Mr. Walrond grew irritable, as he generally did when he was perplexed.

‘His pastor! Heaven help me if I am to be responsible in any way for Thornton Harris! And as for that poor lad, he is old Harold’s grandson and his father’s son, whatever his mother may have been; and he’ll go his own way, as they did, whatever we may do. He could communicate with his friends if he wished it; and, if he doesn’t wish it, it’s little use their trying to communicate with him.’

‘But, my dear sir, if it is as you suppose, who knows what may happen? Is there to be a soul lost, perhaps two, while we do nothing?’

The young man spoke with unusual boldness, fired perhaps by the scenes he had lately been through. But, as usual, something in the expressions he used

moved his father to shock him by enigmatical speech.

‘As for that,’ he said, ‘I should be sorry to see my old friend’s son come to the gallows. But, if things were as they used to be in my young days, the lad might have fought him and killed him in the face of day, and been thought all the better of. There are wrongs that the law cannot right; and therefore, perhaps, it should not meddle with those who take the remedy into their own hands.’

‘Surely, sir, you are not defending the godless practice of duelling? Besides, there is the state of Mr. Harris’s soul to be considered, if he should be cut off in his sins.’

‘The longer Thornton Harris lives, the worse case his soul is like to be in,’ said Mr. Walrond, with that tone in which his

son had never yet been able to distinguish jest from earnest; and he rose and sauntered out of the room, deep in thought, but apparently not willing to talk any further on the subject.

For once even Elizabeth was not quite satisfied with her father's way of taking matters. She understood him, of course, better than John did; but it made her sick with anxiety to think of what might happen, any day, while they looked on and did nothing. Harold had spared his enemy once, but would he do it again if Fate flung another chance so tempting in his way?

If only he would keep his promise, and come to her! But he had promised to tell her when his revenge was accomplished; and at present he had been cheated out of it. And when Elizabeth bethought herself

of how he had been cheated out of it, her heart throbbed high betwixt pride and doubt. Surely not merely circumstances, but his better nature had triumphed then, and surely it would triumph again if need were.

When life seemed to be going rather hardly with her, Elizabeth's usual resort was a long walk ; if a scrambling one, so much the better. Usually she preferred to be alone ; but as John was over for his first visit since he had left them, and since their father seemed to have withdrawn his society for the time, she could hardly leave him solitary. But stay quietly indoors she could not, so after two or three vain attempts to occupy herself as usual, she invited her brother to walk with her ; and they left the house together in the chilly half-light of a cloudy March afternoon.

Fifty different thoughts she pondered as she paced swiftly on by her brother's side, listening to his sedate questions with half an ear, and answering with half attention.

To her young, hopeful imagination everything was possible. Suppose all were to come right at last—suppose Harold was not really the nameless outcast that he believed himself to be !

How doubly pitiful ! if in the meanwhile he should have flung all his chances away—have lost himself, in a mad endeavour after revenge !

Would no one help him—no one stand between him and his despair—and save him from himself ?

How would it be possible to find out anything about anyone so mysterious ? to restrain anyone so restless and reckless ? It was a hard puzzle for her girlish wits,

and yet it did not seem as though either father or brother could help her. And all the latent motherliness of a true woman's nature yearned to help and shield this young fellow on whom Fate had been so hard,—even though she might never see him again, and he might never know that he owed her thanks.

‘Will you not be tired? Hadn't we better go back now?’ asked John, after a time; and she shook her head, turning aside towards the gate that led into a winding bridle-road.

‘A little farther,’ she said, with a pretty appealing gesture. ‘Let's go down this way, and home by Farndon Lane. I have not had half enough walking yet.’

Her brother yielded, as he usually did when she asked anything of him; and they went on down the rough track, John

mournfully resigning himself to the mud that covered his neat boots and grieved his soul; and Elizabeth picking her way lightly over stone and tussock like a bird.

‘John!’ she said, presently, straining her eyes across the field to the left, ‘what is that down there by the brook—close to those alder bushes?’

‘It—it looks almost like a woman; but it can’t be. What should anyone be doing there?’

‘There are stepping-stones across the brook just there, and a sort of a path—don’t you see it? It is a woman—crouching down. Something must be the matter with her!’

She turned towards the low hedge, looking for a place where she might pass it, while her brother hesitated.

‘If there is a path there—she may be

only resting. What reason can we give for speaking to her?’

‘That bundle-of-clothes attitude is reason enough,’ said Elizabeth sharply, slipping through the hedge at a point next to a tree-stem, where it was almost non-existent; and John somewhat reluctantly followed her. Lightly she hurried across the winter-bleached grass of the long low-lying field, and in a few moments was close to that bent crouching figure, which still had not moved.

‘Are you ill? Is there anything we can do for you?’ she asked; and, as the woman still sat motionless, Elizabeth laid a hand on her shoulder.

Then indeed she moved, looking up with a sudden violent start, and lifted a dazed white face that seemed to Elizabeth not altogether unfamiliar.

‘Are you ill?’ she asked again, gently. ‘Surely it is too cold for you to be sitting here.’

The woman’s pale lips moved, slowly and stiffly, but no words came. John Walrond had reached his sister’s side by this time, and he bent down, looking more closely in her face.

‘It is Mr. Harris’s housekeeper!’ he said, drawing Elizabeth aside and speaking in an undertone. ‘I heard that she had left. You had better leave her alone. Possibly she is—not sober.’

Elizabeth knew that Thornton Harris’s late housekeeper had been reckoned ‘not respectable,’—though what was meant by that expression she knew perhaps less than her brother did.

‘She is ill, I am sure of it!’ she answered, half indignantly. ‘See! her hands are

quite blue and numb. I wish we had something to do her good.'

She took the chilled hands between her own soft warm ones, rubbing them vigorously, while the woman's head sank down again upon her knees. But after a moment or two she recovered herself enough to speak—in a faint husky voice that yet did not sound like intoxication.

'I've come a long way to-day! I fell down, getting across. I couldn't get any farther.'

And indeed the skirts of her dress were all soaked in water, as if she had missed her footing on the stepping-stones, and half fallen into the shallow brook.

'Oh! poor thing. She will be frozen!' cried Elizabeth, pitifully. 'Look, John! What shall we do with her? Were you going to Mr. Harris's?' she asked, bending down again.

Something in the question seemed almost to startle the woman from her stupor.

‘No! no! not there. Never there again!’ she cried, lifting her head, and wringing her numbed hands together. ‘If I go there, he will make me stay—and hold my tongue—and go to hell for ever and ever!’

‘Hush!’ said John Walrond, coming forward. ‘You shall not return there. But you must tell us where you want to go.’

She dropped her head upon her knees again and moaned, and the young man laid his hand on his sister’s arm.

‘I will stay with her,’ he said. ‘I would rather you left her. Go back to the farm and send some one down to help me, and we will get her to some shelter. I do not quite like to see you touch her.’

The cold hands that Elizabeth had been

chafing were now clinging to hers—perhaps with a merely physical attraction to their warmth and vitality.

And standing so she turned and faced her brother, a sudden blush burning in her delicate cheek.

‘ I think I know—what you mean !’ she said. ‘ But what harm can the poor thing do me ? Have a minute’s patience ; and I think she will be able to walk, and that will be the best thing for her. If we can get her somewhere, to be warmed and dried, we will go and tell father, and he will know what to do.’

John looked dubious, but his sister did not heed him. She was bending down again, speaking softly and clearly, drawing the woman’s shawl more closely round her bent shoulders.

‘ Try to stand up,’ she said. ‘ My brother

will help you. You will be warmer^{er} when you have been moving a little.'

It was hard to say whether the poor creature understood or not, but Elizabeth put an arm under hers to help her, and signed to her brother to come on the other side, and between them they got her on her feet and even to make a few faltering steps.

'She must go to the farm till my father has seen her,' said John, after a moment. 'I will not be responsible for taking her to the rectory till my father knows about her.'

'I would be responsible,' Elizabeth was answering promptly; but the woman suddenly turned, with more of life in her movements than there had been yet. The young man's voice, speaking close to her dulled ears, had touched some chord of

conscience or memory, whose vibration roused her, body and mind.

‘You there?’ she said. ‘The young parson! Ay! that’s as it should be! What you said drove me away—and it’s brought me back again. I’ve come back, and I’ll tell all I know.’

For a moment she made as if she would press on faster than they were leading her. But her feet failed her and she was obliged to lean heavily upon her supporters, though still as if she were pressing forward.

‘What I said?’ asked John Walrond, wonderingly.

‘Ay! I’ll not go to hell for him. I loved him once, but I’ll not go to hell for him! Gipsy Will warned me, and I wouldn’t heed him; but it’s come on me since. I’ll tell the parson everything, and he’ll not let me——’

Her head sank on her breast and her voice died away in indistinct mutterings. But still she let them draw her forward, if only half unconsciously; and the brother and sister moved on, on either side of her, both too much puzzled and too deep in thought to speak.

Elizabeth's heart beat high with the feeling of one drawing near the key to a mystery. True, anyone else might have doubted whether this poor woman's shameful story was likely to throw any light upon anything but her own sin and sorrow. But to Elizabeth just now the birds and the winds talked of Harold Malreward, and everything strange and unlooked-for seemed as if it should bear some relation to him.

The poor creature's strength barely carried her to the nearest farmhouse, and there John unwillingly left his sister with

her while he went on to the rectory to find his father, and consult with him as to what was next to be done.

The people of the farm looked very coldly on the wanderer. They would, perhaps, not have turned her from the door in her present state, even had Elizabeth not pleaded for her, but they knew too much of her to be cordial. Mrs. Coulson, as she called herself, had not been often seen outside the house to which Thornton Harris had brought her ten years before, and perhaps to his acquaintances at a distance she seemed only the housekeeper she professed to be; but the Deerhurst people knew better, and looked at her askance on the rare occasions when they met her in the lonely country lanes.

Dazed with pain and cold as she was, and hardly conscious, she seemed to re-

cognise the gentleness of Elizabeth's voice and touch, and perhaps she was sufficiently alive to wonder vaguely what was going to be done with her. Certainly, when the farmer's wife bluntly suggested that she might have been on her way back to Mr. Harris's, she roused herself to repudiate the idea with horror; and, when asked again where she had been going, answered, 'Parson Walrond's.'

'He told me, he warned me,' she went on, clinging to Elizabeth's hand. 'No! it was the young parson—and I'll have to tell the old one; and he'll send me to jail! But I'm dying, anyway, and better go to jail than to the fire that never shall be quenched.'

It was plain to Elizabeth that John had taken some unlooked-for opportunity to speak very plainly to this woman, and

that her conscience had helped to give his words a sting that rankled yet. It might have been long enough before her father's straightforward admonitions had done as much; though sinners feared his keen stern eyes as they would never fear his son's. And if Mrs. Coulson's health and nerve had not failed she would have been quite capable of deceiving John Walrond with a pretence of repentance; but she would never have attempted it with his father.

Mr. Walrond was not one of the sentimental order, to whom a sinner is far more interesting than an honest man or woman. But as magistrate and parson he had all his life been used, in a business-like way, to feel himself responsible for all within his bounds. He knew Mrs. Coulson, and disapproved of her, but he sent down the

man at once with a wheel-chair to bring her up to the rectory, prepared to give her house-room and tendance till it should be decided what could be done with her. Before dark the forlorn creature was safely housed under the rectory roof, carrying with her into the realms of fever and delirium a remembrance of Elizabeth's tender voice and hand, and of John Walrond's reasonings of judgment to come.

If Thornton Harris had known that, it might have troubled his slumbers; but he was away, no one knew where, and did not come home for more than a week.

The curate of Colgrave had of course more important, or at any rate more pressing, duties than the charge of this one stray sheep that had wandered into his father's fold, however unfit he might con-

sider his father to deal with a partially-awakened soul.

He had to return to Colgrave the next morning, and leave them to do what they could with her. If he had had his way Elizabeth would never have been allowed to enter the sick-room, where her old nurse was established as a skilful but not very willing attendant. But Mr. Walrond let his daughter please herself in that respect, not being afraid that such contact would soil her purity. And it pleased Elizabeth to wait tenderly on this poor outcast, chiefly out of native kindness of heart; but partly also from a vague, unreasoning feeling that the mystery that surrounded her was somehow connected with Harold.

Whether or not Mrs. Coulson's life was valuable, or her confession of importance, to anybody but herself, she came back to

life and reason sooner than doctor or nurse had expected, and in ten days was ready to be helped downstairs to sit in the little sunny apartment that was known as 'nurse's room.'

Hitherto she had been too ill to be questioned, or allowed to talk much, though she had let drop wild words now and then which showed that there was something that she felt herself bound to say.

Possibly Mr. Walrond might have taken the opportunity to question her a little, on her coming downstairs, but he was away all day on business. And Elizabeth, much as she longed to ask questions, was half afraid of what she might hear, and afraid too of doing harm to the invalid by allowing her to agitate herself.

But, though the inmates of the rectory were willing to leave Mrs. Coulson in quiet

to recover from the fatigue of coming downstairs, some one outside must have been better acquainted with what went on within than might have appeared at first sight probable. She had not been sitting for half-an-hour in that comfortable little room when the knocker of the front-door sounded gently; and the stupid housemaid, opening it, was confronted by a tall, well-dressed man whose face she knew.

‘Can I see Mrs. Coulson?’ asked he, in an off-hand tone; and the girl actually turned to conduct him in, then paused and hesitated, with some glimmerings of reason dawning upon her mind.

‘I don’t know, I’m sure, sir,’ she said. ‘Mrs. Coulson’s been ill, and Mr. Walrond’s out.’

‘I didn’t ask to see the rector, my good girl, and Mrs. Coulson is my housekeeper,

not his. Just have the goodness to show me to her at once.'

His cool air of command took away her presence of mind, as he intended it should. She seemed to have no choice but to lead him down a little passage, and point out to him the door of 'nurse's room.'

Then she turned and left him, with a vague idea of washing her hands of the whole matter, and went back to her pantry and the rubbing of her silver. And then, after an instant, with another momentary flash of intellect, she hurried across the hall to the drawing-room, hardly waiting to tap at the door.

'Miss Elizabeth! Mr. Harris is here! He wanted to see that——Mrs. Coulson; and he is gone in to see her. I don't know if I did right to let him in.'

Elizabeth started to her feet. There

was no time to waste in blaming Sarah, or in thinking of her. The house was invaded by a man whom Mr. Walrond had never of late tolerated, or even greeted in the street. And the fact that he had stretched such a point and made good his entrance showed that he had an end to gain, and certainly no good one. What could he want with that poor creature but to draw her back to him, to silence her, by fair means or foul; that, as she herself had said, she might hold her tongue and lose her soul?

Elizabeth feared the face of no man, despite her maidenly gentleness. Her innocent ignorance, linked to the inheritance of her father's high spirit, made her fearless. John, in her place, would certainly have gone to confront Thornton Harris; but not half so swiftly and eagerly as she now hurried

across the hall, and down the passage, and opened the door, without ceremony.

The sick woman was leaning forward in her arm-chair, her dark hollow eyes fixed and eager, with an expression that was hard to read; and her thin fingers clutching the arms of the chair, as though some invisible force was drawing her from it, which she resisted thus.

Before her stood Thornton Harris; his steely eyes fixed upon hers with a curious compelling look; his hands holding his riding-whip cross-wise, and his arms hanging down before him. Certainly he had not had time to say much to his late housekeeper. Perhaps he had said nothing at all; perhaps the mere glance of his eye was almost enough, to this poor creature who for ten years had followed it like a dog, and trembled at his frown.

Even at Elizabeth's entrance she did not take her eyes from her master's face ; but a sudden look of relief came over her own, and she half put out a hand, as if grasping at some prop that might sustain her.

Mr. Harris started, took off his hat, which hitherto he had not removed, and bowed politely, while Elizabeth passed him with no more recognition than a look, and took the sick woman's hand.

‘ Good afternoon, Miss Walrond,’ he began, in an easy, conversational tone. ‘ The rector is out, I hear. I am much obliged to him for his kindness to an old servant of mine. I had not heard of it till late last night, when I came home. I should have been very willing to take the poor thing in myself, for she served me very fairly for ten years. In fact, I called in just now to say that I am sending down

for her to-night, and my people will soon nurse her well again.'

The hollow eyes flashed at the cold tone in which he spoke of that ten years' 'service,' but Mrs. Coulson did not seem to have a word to say. Only her hand tightened on Elizabeth's, and her looks, as if with an effort, took themselves from that baleful, immovable face opposite, and turned towards the young lady's.

'Mrs. Coulson is my father's guest just now,' she said, coldly and clearly. 'I could not think of letting her go away in his absence, even if she were fit to be moved.'

'Not if she were his invited guest,' said the lawyer, smoothly. 'But his hospitality left him no choice, any more than necessity left to her. And now I really cannot permit her to be a burden on him any longer.'

‘You must discuss that with my father himself, when he comes back.’

‘Excuse me, Miss Walrond, but even your hospitality and your father’s does not give you a right to interfere with the liberty of the subject! The proper place for my servant is in my house, and I must really insist upon having her conveyed there.’

‘Not if she does not wish to go, Mr. Harris.’

‘She does wish it.’

He had purposely spoken in as sneering and contemptuous a tone as he could assume, but Elizabeth did not flinch. And he looked not at her, but at the hapless creature for whom they were contending, like Satan and the Archangel for the body of Moses.

Those soft clear eyes of Elizabeth’s had too much of her father in them to be plea-

sant for rogues to face. Innocence is always hard for such to face, I believe; but innocence backed by a good deal of native shrewdness and courage is a power indeed—Una and her lion in one.

‘She does wish it,’ repeated Thornton Harris, boldly; and Elizabeth answered, laconically enough,

‘I think not.’

‘Mrs. Coulson!’ he asked, bending forward, ‘do you not intend to come back to my house when I send for you? Remember! it is your last chance.’

Her last chance of what? Elizabeth could hardly guess, but she felt the thin hand tighten on hers till she could almost have cried out.

‘Don’t let me go!’ gasped the faint, husky voice. ‘I shall go if he tells me to. Don’t let me!’

‘You hear!’ he said, with a sort of smile.

‘She will do my bidding, as she should. You will hardly dare to take the responsibility of detaining her, Miss Walrond.’

‘I dare not let her go! And, to speak plainly, Mr. Harris, nothing but force should make me do so. And my father’s man is in the yard and three strong women-servants in the house, and plenty of the village people within call. So I think you will hardly venture to use force.’

‘I certainly should not do anything so absurd,’ he answered, trying to hide his bitter chagrin under a contemptuous smile. ‘This is a rather ridiculous way of receiving a natural and reasonable proposition, Miss Walrond, and so you will find your father will think.’

‘I am not afraid of what my father will think. Sarah! show Mr. Harris the door.’

The stupid housemaid must have been

hovering very near, anxious to repair her fault, for she had answered the bell before it had done sounding.

Mr. Harris did not attempt to linger. Perhaps he had never expected much more than to have the opportunity of speaking a word of warning, though he had made a bold attempt to secure absolute safety in carrying off the woman from this refuge which she had found, and where she might so easily do him harm. He looked at her with the same strange mesmerist glance with which he had first held her, and said significantly, 'Remember!' Then, with a slighting, half-bow to Elizabeth, as though he scorned her as a meddlesome child, he strolled out of the door, with nothing in his looks that betokened any consciousness of defeat, but with black, bitter wrath in his heart.

At the door in the back-yard his man was waiting, the same bullet-headed individual whose zeal on one occasion got Harold Malreward into trouble. He was holding Harris's horse by the bridle, and beside him stood a little pony, harnessed to a small low cart.

'You may take that back, Johnson. She's not coming,' said his master shortly, taking the bridle from him. 'Find out somehow when Mr. Walrond is expected to leave home again, and let me know when I come back.'

'Yes, sir. Am I to sit up for you?'

'No! I'm going to Colgrave, and very likely I shan't be back till to-morrow. Leave things ready in case I should come back, but don't expect me.'

Johnson climbed into the cart and drove away, and Harris paused a moment, lean-

ing against his horse's shoulder, and looking round on the rambling old house and stables with a keen, meditative glance, as if considering ways and means. Then he too mounted, turned out of the yard, and rode away in the opposite direction to Colgrave, on the road that led to Scarrisdale Moor and Aldersford.

CHAPTER III.

C O M E !

Here was I with my arm, and heart,
And brain, all yours for a word, a want
Put into a look—just a look, your part.

R. BROWNING.

THE lawyer had hardly left the room when Mrs. Coulson turned to Elizabeth with a pitiful desperate eagerness in her worn, white face and sunken eyes.

‘The parson!’ she said. ‘Ask him to come to me. I haven’t told him yet, and I was forgetting——’

‘My father is gone out. He will not

be home till late,' answered Elizabeth, compassionately. 'You shall see him to-morrow.'

'He will come for me again before then, and make me go somehow, and never let me tell. And I've sworn falsely already, and brought the curse on me, and it will never be lifted off until I've told. I want to tell now, quickly, before he comes and looks at me again.'

'He shall not come! Don't be afraid; we won't let him in.'

'But I must tell, for all that. I might die to-night and go straight to the burning flame. I'll tell *you*.'

Elizabeth hesitated a moment. The woman seemed only half-sane, between her weakness and her terror, and yet she seemed bent on speaking, and possibly she might be more inclined to speak the un-

varnished truth now than in her calmer moments, as *in vino veritas*.

‘If you tell me, you must tell my old nurse too,’ she said at last. ‘She is quite safe. She will repeat nothing unless I tell her, but I must have some one to hear your story with me—to help me to remember it.’

An unwilling look showed itself for a moment in Mrs. Coulson’s face. Even then she had jealousy enough left to distrust the woman of her own rank, who would certainly distrust her. But the hunger for confession, the longing to share the burden that she had so long borne alone, prevailed.

‘I’ll tell *you*,’ she said. ‘But she may be there if you choose.’

Elizabeth certainly did choose. She had great belief in nurse’s untutored shrewd-

ness and powers of judgment, and in spite of her pity for this poor creature she could not help having a suspicion that what they were going to hear now would perhaps be very different from what some one else would hear when she had recovered herself a little and had time to 'make up' a tale.

'I've sworn falsely on the Book, in the court of justice,' began Mrs. Coulson, her eyes fixed upon Elizabeth's gentle compassionate face, and ignoring old nurse's keen, watchful looks in the background. 'Can they put me in prison for that?'

'I don't know. Not for long anyhow, I should think, if you tell the truth now and try to make up for it.'

'I don't care much if they do! It'll not be as bad as what I've had to go through ever since. Will Herne warned me that

the black curse would come on me, body and soul, and wither the marrow in my bones. And that is what I feel like. But I didn't mind about it at first. He laughed and said it was nothing, and I'd not done his bidding all those years to turn back for a trifle.'

'Who told you to do it, then?'

'Harris! The man I loved—that pretended once to love me—that said just now that I'd served him "fairly" for ten years! Served him? If I hadn't served him—ay, and better than fairly!—I shouldn't be what I am now. But I'll serve him this once more as he should be served! and I'll not lose my soul for him. He's had enough of me without that!'

'You are tiring yourself out,' said Elizabeth, gently and firmly. 'Tell us what it was he made you swear.'

‘ I told them, in that court of justice—and kissed the Book—that he came in just as usual on that night when Sam Crofton was murdered. It was a lie ! He came in without his neckcloth, and the collar of his shirt was torn in two. And I swore that the pin that they showed me of his had been lost long before ; and that I thought Will Herne had taken it. It had been lost before, and I had found it, and brought it him, and seen him stick it into his neckcloth that very day.’

‘ If you had told that, would the murder have been brought home to him ?’ asked the young girl, with wide dilating eyes.

‘ I don’t know ! He thought so, for he promised me—he half-promised to marry me if I’d say what he told me !’

‘ Was that—all you knew ?’

‘ Nay ! There was something more, and

he doesn't know that I know it. If I had told him, I think he would have killed me. There was a letter. It was brought out at the trial, and Harris was surprised enough. But little he knew how it got there !

‘ How was it ? ’

‘ You see, Will Herne's mother was a cousin of mine ; for she was no gipsy, only her folks and my folks went with the gipsies at times. And I was glad to have him come to the place, for I was lonesome enough, and I told him more, maybe, than I should. He put me up to try to get into Harris's secrets, that he might be afraid to break with me, or to take anyone in my place, and between us we got into one of his hiding-places, long ago, and I found some letters and showed one of them to Will. And Will kept it, and would never let me have it to put back, though I begged

it of him many a time, for I was afraid of my life. I never saw anything of it till it came out at the trial, and then they said it was from Squire Malreward's wife to her husband. But Harris wrote it.'

'How do you know that?'

'It's in his writing—part of it! There were the same words, over and over again, part in his writing, and part in what's meant for some one else's. He could write pretty much like anyone he chose, but this was only as though he'd been trying his hand a bit. I knew it well enough. I looked every minute to hear some one say that it was his hand. But no one did. And I think he guessed that it was through me somehow that it had come out, for he never spoke kindly to me after. But he wasn't afraid of me. He said I could be put in prison for perjury if I dared

to tell, and no one would believe me.'

She was silent, resting her chin upon her thin hands, her eyes full of smouldering, resentful fire, her lips moving still, as if she were counting up old injuries.

'I hope they will believe me,' she said at last. 'I'd like to see him ruined and disgraced—hanged, maybe. But it was not for that I made up my mind to tell . . . I daren't hold my tongue any longer. I got worse every day, and Will told me it was because I'd sworn to a lie. And the young parson came and told me that I was living in sin, and that I was on the road to hell. And Harris laughed in my face when I said that he'd promised to marry me. Then I got up very early one morning and went away. I'd felt all night as if I were dying; and I was afraid I'd die before I could speak out! I knew he'd

never let me speak while I was near him . . . I felt better already, as I went along ; and I thought maybe the curse would be taken away ! . . . But I didn't know who to tell, and when I got to my own people they thought I was crazy. And then I got worse again, and I thought I must come back here and tell Parson Walrond, because even Harris is afraid of him. But I don't know what happened on the way here.'

'My father will see you to-morrow, and you must tell all this to him,' said Elizabeth, after a pause. 'He won't be hard on you. But he will advise you what to do for the best, and how to undo the harm that you may have done.'

'I never thought much of that,' she answered, simply, fixing her hollow eyes on Elizabeth's face ; while over her shoul-

der nurse looked at her young lady with a shake of the head, and a kindly but scornful smile. 'I want the curse taken off *me*! I shouldn't have done it if he hadn't bade me. I've never done any harm but what he made me do—the curse ought to be on him, not on me.'

She half turned from them again, leaning back in her chair, exhausted by the long story and all the emotions that it had called up, and having apparently said all her say. Perhaps there was not, and never had been, anything very strong in her character except the love and fear that was now soured into hate and fear, and a very decided tinge of superstition that had made her miserable in wrong-doing without being able to keep her from it.

Nurse looked unutterable things, but she made no remark, and took out her

knitting as if she meant to mount guard over Mrs. Coulson for the present.

And Elizabeth did not mean to discuss the story before the chief actor in it, and softly went away, shocked and awed by what had been to her a new revelation of the wickedness of the world. But yet her pulses were tingling with excitement, and a sort of hope. This woman's confession, if it could be proved to be true, opened a vista of all manner of unknown possibilities. If Thornton Harris was in truth a murderer, and that letter a forgery, surely the dishonour of Harold's father, and the slur cast on Harold's birth, might well be part of the same vile conspiracy.

She paced the drawing-room in restless impatience, half longing for her father to come back that he might hear it all, half dreading lest his cooler reason and wider

experience might shatter all her hopes, and Mrs. Coulson's story break down upon repetition.

Presently the house seemed to grow unbearable to her, with suspense hanging over her like a fog in which it was difficult to breathe. Elizabeth wrapped a shawl round her and stepped out into the garden, flooded just now with pale spring sunlight from a sun not far from its setting. And up and down the walks she paced again, while still those thoughts went with her; and as she turned and lifted her eyes to the long, irregular *façade* of the house, the old familiar home looked strange to her, thinking of that poor, weak, wicked creature sitting there and holding the thread of two men's lives in her faltering, untrustworthy hands.

Elizabeth was 'religious,' as girls of her

temperament and education generally are. But it had been in a simple, childlike, unreasoning fashion, such as can hardly go through life unchanged with any man or woman. Sooner or later—and perhaps the sooner the better—comes some crisis of doubt and trouble, some suggestion of ‘the mystery of iniquity,’ that finds the old formulas inadequate, or, at any rate, the old understanding of them.

Mrs. Coulson’s story was not a very uncommon one perhaps, but it was the darkest Elizabeth had yet heard, and the sorest trial her faith had yet had. It opened a vista of the far-working powers of evil, such as she had never dreamed of; a picture of Satan playing at chess, and moving men and women here and there at his will. Thornton Harris had certainly triumphed so far, and, if he were eventu-

ally to be checkmated, it would be more by evil than good. Mrs. Coulson repented after a fashion, certainly, but if she did confess and amend, it would only be under terror of hell-fire, through threats of physical, material punishment such as Elizabeth could never have brought herself to use, though John apparently did not disdain them. And Harold had been cheated out of name and fame and happiness, by sleight of men and plots of unimagined wickedness; while, if he was ever to regain his rightful place, it would be through more wickedness, and by fighting evil with evil—as if rogues must needs fall out before honest men could come by their own.

It was a dark side of the world, to be suddenly presented to a girl who had grown up thinking her father's broad,

cheery optimism the only view to be taken of life.

And after the first moment of dismayed discouragement Elizabeth's heart and soul revolted against it, as they had done when some book she read had seemed to make the worse the better reason, and evil stronger than good. Was this Real Life?—Who cared? There was an Ideal more real than this—deeper rooted in the eternal realities. The Right should conquer, and not by base weapons either; and Truth wear her white robes unstained. Ay! and—since a woman must always have her individual human interest—Harold Malreward should be a martyr, or a hero, and shame his enemies by silent endurance, or conquer them by fair and chivalrous means.

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Along the lowest path in the rectory garden the nut-trees interlaced themselves overhead, and showed their topmost boughs temptingly just above the high wall that screened it from the lane. At one end of the path was a door in the wall, kept locked at times lest temptation should prove too strong for the honesty of the village boys, and seldom used, even when left on the latch, by anyone not of the family.

From the farther end of the long walk Elizabeth heard the click of the latch, and turned, with a momentary idea that it must be her father, or John, who had entered. An instant's thought told her that it could not well be either. But, when she saw who it really was, she was ready to believe for a moment that her eyes deceived her. For it was Harold Malreward

himself who dashed in at the open door, glanced hurriedly round the garden, and walked swiftly down the path towards her. He looked as though he had been running far and fast, though his face was pale rather than flushed. His shoulders were still set back in the resolute pose of one who sets himself to husband wind and strength, while yet making all possible speed, and his broad chest heaved with deep-drawn panting breaths.

‘Is—Harris—here!’ he gasped, almost before those rapid steps had brought him within earshot, and the strained eagerness of his voice matched well the strained endurance of his looks.

‘No ; he is gone,’ answered Elizabeth, promptly.

‘How—long?’

‘I don’t know. At least an hour, I think.’

Harold stood still, and flung one hand above his head with a mocking, triumphant gesture.

‘Too late!’ he cried, still breathlessly, with the strangest mingling of triumph and disappointment in his face. ‘Too late!—and the devil—will have his due—after all!’

He leaned against a tree-stem, breathing fast and deep, taking off his hat to let the cool evening air breathe on his forehead, where the thick, dark hair lay damp and matted.

‘What do you mean?’ asked Elizabeth, anxiously. ‘No! never mind—don’t try to talk now. Come and sit down here, and rest.’

There was a low garden-seat close by, and Harold flung himself upon it willingly enough, leaning back, and looking up with

the same expression into her puzzled face, as she stood before him full of wonder and smothered impatience.

‘What does it mean?’ he said, presently. ‘I wish I could tell you! I should know then, perhaps, why I was fool enough to run seven miles or so on the chance of saving a villain from meeting with his deserts. But you ought to know, for I believe it was all your doing!’

‘My doing?’

‘Ay! Your brother stepped between me and my revenge once, and if I let him do it, it was half for the sake of my little play-fellow, who helped me all she could, and was sorry for me! And to-day—— Well! when I knew there were to be six of them upon one, I remembered that you would be sure to hear that I had had a hand in it, and that at best I should

have to confess to you that I knew——’

He was speaking quietly enough now—almost meditatively—in the reaction after the fierce strain and fiercer excitement just checked and brought to a standstill. But perhaps he had forgotten how enigmatical his speech must seem to his eager hearer.

‘Knew what?’ asked Elizabeth, trembling.

‘I beg your pardon! I forgot I had not confessed already. You see, I guessed before to-day that Thornton Harris was possibly in danger of being served as he served his partner. But I did not know till to-day that the time was fixed, or that he was to have six of them upon him. And when I heard that I started off, like a fool, to warn him. I daresay he wouldn’t have believed me! But I meant to do

that much to give him fair play, for your sake.'

'For my sake? What had I to do with it?' she asked, speaking sharply in her suspense. 'Do you mean that this wickedness is going on somewhere now, and it is too late to stop it?'

'Too late? Yes! By an hour—it seems—though I lost no time on the way. And now, what happens is no fault of mine!'

He laughed, as he ended, exultantly, and Elizabeth glanced at him, and up at the house, and pressed her hands together.

'Is there nothing to be done, then?'

'Is your father at home?'

'No!'

'When will he be back?'

'Not till late to-night!'

‘ Ah ! And the nearest magistrate in his absence is Cowleyshaw, five miles beyond Aldersford ! No ! there is nothing to be done, and why should we care ? Let him get what he has wrought for ! ’

There was fierce triumph enough in the look that met Elizabeth’s. Was there nothing else ? She half turned away, clasping her hands over her face ; trying hard to think. Present to her mind all the while was that other figure of which Harold knew nothing—Mrs. Coulson, with her strange confession and spasmodic remorse. If her story was true, it would be to Harold’s interest to save Harris ; and yet—should she tell him ? No ! save as a last resource ! Let him save himself first—let the nobler self, that had triumphed once, triumph again, and once for all !

‘ Elizabeth,’ he said, more gently, ‘ are

you crying? Surely you do not think him worth that?’

‘I might cry, for you,’ she answered, turning upon him proudly, ‘if I thought you were really letting yourself be beaten, as you say. But I am only thinking how you are to save him.’

‘*I* save him? Why?’

‘Because you ought, and will. Because he is your enemy, and you are bound to deal fairly and generously by him, whoever does not. Because you knew that, and came all this way to try to save him.’

She looked like a slender, girlish prophetess, with her cheeks so pale with passion, and her clear eyes so full of light. And Harold looked at her thoughtfully, without a word, the baleful exultation dying out of his inscrutable gipsy eyes.

‘Come,’ she said. ‘Where is this thing to be done, and when? Could a fast horse take you there in time?’

‘Possibly,’ he answered, in an unmoved tone.

‘Thank heaven! my father took the roan with him to-day. The mare is in the stable, and fresh; and I lend her to you. Kill her, if you must, but get there in time.’

‘And what then?’

‘You must warn that man—fight for him—save him,’ she said, her voice growing more confident in its insistence, in spite of his unmoved face. ‘And you will be glad all your life after. Come!’

She held out her hand, and he caught it, and sprang to his feet.

‘I will!’ he said, with curt emphasis; and for an instant they stood hand in

hand, Elizabeth dumb with the joy of her success.

‘ I must take the mare,’ he said. ‘ I will not kill her, if I can help it ; but there is little enough time to spare !’

‘ I know !’ cried she, starting. ‘ This is the nearest way to the stables. I can show you where everything is.’

Along the narrow garden paths she flashed like a bird, Harold following ; and in a moment they were in the stable-yard.

‘ James is away, as usual,’ she said, looking round. ‘ Perhaps it is just as well. You can do it as quickly for yourself, and there need be no explanations. There is the saddle, and there the bits. She wants the curb, I believe. And here is a whip, but she wants little of that.’

She was lifting the saddle itself from the

tree, when Harold interposed and took it from her; then, weighing the light hunting-crop a moment in her hand, she laid it down and vanished.

‘I shall return before you are ready,’ she called back as she went; and, indeed, before he had drawn the last strap through its buckle she was by his side again.

‘Now,’ she panted, ‘you must drink this, and put this in your pocket. There! take them, and wait half a moment. There is something more yet.’

The first was a brimming glass of wine, not by any means unwelcome to Harold after his long race; the second a packet, presumably of provisions. And in another moment she had returned.

‘Take this, too, and use it if you must!’ she said, with a shiver, half of excitement, and only half of fear.

‘Loaded?’ he asked, as he took the little pistol from her hand.

‘Yes! Father showed me how, not long ago.’

Harold looked curiously into her pale little face.

‘Would you use it, if you were in my place?’ he asked, with half a smile, the meaning of which was hard to read.

‘If it were right—to save life!’ she answered, boldly.

‘Well, none of their lives are worth much, I daresay! But do you know that you are putting temptation in my way, that it is my enemy I am going to meet?’

‘I trust you. You are going to save him!’

‘I suppose so! Not one of the six is so great a villain as he is, but six to one is not fair play.’

He thrust the pistol into his breast-pocket, and turned to lead the mare out; and Elizabeth followed, a sudden flush dyeing her face up to the roots of her soft hair.

‘Defend yourself with it, anyhow,’ she said, steadily enough. ‘I have persuaded you to go into danger! Don’t think I forget that. Don’t make me sorry for it all my life long.’

Suddenly, as she ended, her lips quivered, and two great tears rose as suddenly in her wide, imploring eyes. She looked so child-like and pathetic—she who a moment before had been a gentler Judith—that Harold rather forgot himself, in the hurry of departure, with the mare chafing to be off.

‘Sorry? You?’ he said, almost passionately. ‘Should a man’s good angel be

sorry for having lifted him out of the mire? I shall thank you all my life; and perhaps if I were to get killed to-night I should have reason to thank you most of all.'

'But don't get killed, all the same!' answered Elizabeth, hardly above a whisper, but forcing her lips to a smile.

'I will not; and he shall not either, if man can prevent it! Wish me good speed, and I'll be gone.'

'God speed you! God keep you!'

He was mounted in a moment, despite the mare's impatience, and out of the yard in another moment, and out of sight like a figure in a dream.

And, as in a dream, Elizabeth was aware still of a warm kiss dropped upon her little cold fingers, and a pressure that had left them tingling.

Motionless she stood till the last echo of the mare's swift feet had died away in the distance ; then stole silently back into the house, and gathered up the traces of her late hasty preparations, moving to and fro with noiseless mechanical neatness, while her thoughts were following that wild pair, horse and rider, on their wild flight she knew not where.

And then— Well ! no one knows what the Spartan women did after they had spoken those brave words about the shields, and had watched their husbands, and sons, and lovers go marching out—a gallant show—till the misty distance hid them even from eyes that love made keen. Perhaps they wept and wrung their hands, after the men were gone, though they had no look but of scorn for him who stayed behind. And perhaps Elizabeth wept and

COME!

115

trembled too, though she had sent Harold on his way like any Spartan dame, and would not, even now, have lifted a finger to hold him back.

CHAPTER IV.

HE HAS BEATEN ME AFTER ALL.

Some die laughing, and some die quaffing,
And some die high on tree ;
Some die playing, and some die praying,
But I wot sae willna we !

A. C. SWINBURNE.

THAT night, between eleven and twelve o'clock, while Elizabeth was waiting and watching for her father, a slender, wide-eyed ghost, cowering over the justice-room fire, John Walrond, in his lodging in Colgrave, was laying his head on the pillow, prepared to sleep the sleep of the curate who has been dutifully obeying his

vicar's orders from ten in the morning till ten at night.

Luckily for him, custom was beginning to inure him to the difficulties of his position, and, like most people who have to work hard under orders, he was beginning to feel a pleasure in the work itself, quite apart from any results. There were many men in Colgrave, and, therefore, many minds; and some amongst the many that Mr. Ravenstone, and even John himself, could reach and touch. And in their honest rejoicing over these 'brands snatched from the burning' they could escape from the thought of the awful fate which they honestly believed awaited those who would not listen to them,—as is mercifully permitted in the case of those who believe as John Walrond did, lest every earnest, thoughtful man should go mad.

How long he had been asleep he did not know, but certainly he was far in the land of dreams when he was recalled by a sound of something pattering against the window-pane. For a moment or two he lay wondering how the still, tranquil night, upon which he had looked out the last thing before going to bed, could have given birth to fierce intermittent rain or hail. Then he started up, suddenly convinced that what had roused him was neither rain nor hail, but someone throwing small stones against the window.

It was a dark night, and the streets of Colgrave were very imperfectly lighted; but looking out of the window John could discern a tall dark figure standing beside a horse, which was harnessed to a nondescript sort of light cart. The figure was as tall as Mr. Ravenstone's, and for a mo-

ment the curate fancied it must be his indefatigable vicar. But the voice was not that of Mr. Ravenstone, though it was one he knew.

‘Mr. Walrond, you are wanted,’ it said. ‘Dress yourself quickly, and come down.’

He drew back, and hurried on two or three garments; wondering, but without the thrill of pleasant excitement that many young men would have felt. Another moment, and a sudden thought sent him to the window again.

‘One word!’ he said. ‘Is there anything wrong at home?’

‘No, no!’ said the voice, impatiently, yet with some compunction in its tone. ‘It is up at Calton Edge you are wanted. Only be quick.’

‘Calton Edge’ conveyed no meaning to John Walrond’s mind. It was six miles

from Colgrave, and he had done no exploring since he came to the town, being too busy, and, indeed, not much interested at any time in the wild and almost uninhabited districts of the moor edges.

But he was obedient, and dressed himself as quickly as he could, and in a moment more was out in the street, where, to his intense surprise, it was Harold Malreward who turned towards him, saying, in the most matter-of-fact tone,

‘Have you your overcoat?’

‘No!’

‘You had better get it. It is cold over the hills to-night. Now! which is the doctor’s house? We want him even more than you.’

‘Dr. Charlton lives in this street—there—next to the corner. But Dr. Rayner has more experience.’

‘Rayner is too old to jump up in a hurry and rattle up to Calton Edge. (Jump in, quick!) Charlton must do, if he is at home.’

As in a dream, John Walrond obeyed; pointed out the night-bell at the doctor’s door, heard the peal which the other made it sound, and heard the peremptory message which he delivered to the sleepy man-servant. There was an odd contrast between the young man’s dress and his manner of speaking; but the servant was not awake enough to notice it, though John Walrond did. Plainly, Harold Malreward was himself again that night, whatever part he might have been playing of late, or might need to play again.

In another moment he was in the cart again, and they were rattling along the stony street and out of the town as fast as

the clumsily-made but powerful horse could go. The pace at which they were going rather took away John's readiness to question his companion; but presently natural curiosity triumphed over the inclination to sit tight and hold his breath.

‘I have complied with your request, Mr. Malreward,’ he said, ‘but I should be glad to know where we are going, and for what purpose?’

‘And I—should be glad to leave you to find out for yourself,’ answered Harold, slowly, after a moment. ‘But I have no right to do that. All that I can tell you you ought to know. Do you know that you saved a man's life, there in Colgrave, on the polling-day?’

‘I—I could not think so!’ stammered John Walrond, shocked and startled. ‘You would have rescued him just the same without my assistance.’

‘Should I? Well, you did it, and you will never know how much risk you ran in doing it. But to-night his time was come, I suppose, and you were not there; and I came too late to be of much use. And he is done-for this time, I fear, after all.’

‘Done for? Do you mean killed?—Mr. Harris?’

‘Killed he is not, or I should not be moving heaven and earth to get a parson and a doctor to him. But I doubt very much whether either of you can do much for him. And I—I ought to be glad; and yet, I verily believe, I am fool enough to be sorry!’

He laughed as he ended: a laugh that told far less of mirth than of body and mind confused and overstrained, but which horrified his hearer still more.

‘ But—good heavens !—do you mean to say that Mr. Harris has met with foul play ?’

‘ He has met with those who would have done to him as he did to another. Foul play it was, inasmuch as there were six to one ; but he went better armed than they could, and they knew it. But I, who would have been glad to meet him, one to one, thought the odds too heavy, and did my best to interfere. I did interfere, and what happened afterwards is no fault of mine, for no man could have foreseen it.’

‘ Was it a plot, then, to rob and murder him ? And how did you come to know of it ?’

‘ It was a plot ; and I came to know of it because I have been living lately in a world that you know very little of ; where men have no home, no name, no character,

and no laws. I hope they have no souls ! Hearts they have, as I have proved, and can bear witness. But their hearts did not speak up for Thornton Harris, and small blame to them !

‘ But, why did you not inform the police ? ’

‘ In the first place, because I hadn’t time. And, if I had had time, I doubt very much whether I should have done it. It was not till—till something put it before me in a new light that I really began to bestir myself in the matter.’

‘ Then, if the wretched man dies, I fear his blood will be upon your head.’

‘ Possibly ! And yet it seemed a good deal to hold back from having it on my hand instead. I meant to have had it so at one time, but Fate—and some one else—would not let it be. Do you remember

directing my attention to a Bible, that night when your father locked me up in a room in his house ?’

John Walrond faced round and looked at his companion uneasily. A very real suspicion crossed him that this young man could not be altogether in his right mind. He had not sufficient imagination to picture to himself how a man should behave under such strange circumstances, but Harold’s mingling of real regret and cool recklessness seemed to him altogether unnatural, and even shocking.

‘ I fear I didn’t use it as you proposed,’ went on Harold, in the same tone, ‘ but I tried his fortune with it—or my own. And there came up a text about vengeance, that seemed almost too *àpropos*. I did not intend to pay any heed to it, practically, but it has worked itself round to that,

nevertheless ; so that here am I doing my best for him, and not quite sure whether I am not much to blame in not having done more.'

' I cannot guess to what you refer !' said the other, gently and somewhat nervously.

' No ? Oh, well ! it doesn't matter ! I thought you knew all about that. You saved his life, anyhow ; so, to-night, I came to you. It was a case of applying to the man's friends, and I don't know that he has any.'

' Where and when did it happen ?' asked John, after a moment, during which he had been closely studying all that he could see of his companion's looks.

The moon was just rising over the bare shoulder of the moor towards which they were travelling. But her face was coppery and dim, and two or three bars of cloud

lay along the horizon, from between which she seemed to peer as through a prison-grate. The night was very still, though cold, and felt somehow more like autumn than early spring. And the eerie stillness of those upland solitudes, and the strangeness of their errand, sent a shiver through John Walrond's bones.

Harold had been looking straight before him, urging on the horse with whip and rein, leaning forward as if he would infect the creature with his own impatience, yet speaking abstractedly, as if half to himself, or, thinking aloud. But at this direct question he looked round, drawing himself together, perhaps, physically and mentally.

‘Your knowing time and place can do no harm, I suppose,’ he said, ‘but you will see that I must be careful, for the

sake of those fellows whom *I* won't bring to justice, whoever else may try to do so. Well! they knew that he had money with him, and that he was coming across from Aldersford, though he had given out that he was gone to Colgrave, yonder. By rights he should have been met with on Scarrisdale Moor, where he met Crofton; but his road did not lie that way, you see! They waited for him up on Thansley Edge, where the road dips down suddenly between high banks, as it leaves the open ground; and I overtook him just before he got there.'

'Well?' said John Walrond, eagerly. This story seemed to him in the last degree bizarre and incredible, and yet it was too consecutive to agree with the idea that had crossed him just before.

Harold gave the horse a cut with the

whip and looked up to where a light on Calton Edge was beginning to twinkle in the far distance, like a star just below the horizon.

‘I wonder if we are in time,’ he said, ‘and I wonder if he wishes now that he had believed what I said? . . . I had spent ten minutes in going round by the lodge to pick up old Bilson the keeper. I thought if there was any fighting he might be useful, and he would never have forgiven me if he had been out of it. But Harris didn’t believe me, and he wouldn’t come back. He pretended to suppose that I was mistaken; but I believe he thought it was a plot, and that Bilson and I were conspiring together to fetch him back into danger. He wouldn’t take warning, though I said more than ever I thought to have said to him while I lived, and Bilson spoke up, too. He went

on, and Bilson and I exchanged a word or two and followed him.'

He let his voice drop as if utterly weary of the subject, but when his companion made a movement and an inarticulate sound of questioning, he went on, in an indifferent, almost impatient tone :

'They were waiting for him, of course, in the hollow way. I made a push, and had all but overtaken him, when I caught sight of them, and shouted to Bilson to come on. The rest turned and ran, I believe, but two were close on him, and there was one of them that had good reason to stay! One caught at the bridle, as far as I could see, and the other aimed a blow at him with a stick. I turned that with my riding-whip, and then—I don't know what happened! He put his horse at the bank, I suppose, and the soil crumbled under his

feet. They were down together, and he undermost, the next minute ; and I—went to get him out. That's all I know about it.'

'And what became of the robbers?'

'They ran for it, I conclude, after the rest. Bilson and I had enough to do to look after him. We got him from under the horse at last, and presently on to a hurdle, and down as far as Mather's, at Calton Edge, and there he is now.'

'Have you reason, then, to think him seriously injured?'

'Bilson says that he can't get over it, and the old man has had plenty of experience,' answered Harold, with a quick shudder. 'His back is broken, they think! Hush!—it won't bear talking about! I wished his death—planned it, as you know—but not such a death in life

as it will be if he lives. I could have killed him easily—so easily!—but I tried to save him, and failed. And I am sick to death of the whole business.'

John Walrond had not the most remote idea what to say. Perhaps his father, in his place, would have felt the same lack of ideas; but Mr. Walrond had a belief in the sovereign efficacy of 'letting alone,' which was not shared by his son. He was racking his brain for some answer to make to this strange confession, that had been only half-addressed to him, and had opened his lips to speak, when Harold's quick gesture checked him, and the young man spoke again in a very different tone.

'We shall be at the gate in a moment, now. Hold tight!—the cross-road here is full of holes. Will you hold the reins while I get down?'

They were in a narrow lane, from which they passed, through a crazy wooden gateway, into a small yard, beyond which, in the moonlight, John could distinguish a tiny farmhouse, no bigger or better than an ordinary labourer's cottage, save for the small farm buildings that adjoined it and surrounded the yard.

Harold whistled, and an elderly man came out of the house and went to the horse's head, and John carefully dismounted from the cart.

'Listen!' said Harold, holding up his hand; and the other listened, he knew not what for, and heard nothing but the loud breathing of the tired horse and the gentle creaking of his harness.

'The doctor is coming, and not far behind us,' said Harold, after a moment. 'Come! let us go in.'

It was a little ordinary cottage kitchen that they saw as they entered—a picture of homely, ordinary life, raised all at once into tragedy by two figures, dimly seen in the flickering light of the fire and one candle that burned on the high mantelshelf.

One was a stark, corpse-like figure laid on the wide high-backed settle, with coat and vest unfastened, and head fallen back across a pile of rough pillows. Beside it sat an old man, erect and rigid, with stern watchful face that expressed little anxiety and no compassion. The fire flickering on his strongly-marked features accentuated them with heavy shadows that intensified their expression, while, in the candle-light, that motionless, upturned face upon the couch looked pale and pure as marble—but marble that, by some slip of the sculp-

tor's hand, had taken on the faintest of sneering smiles instead of the lawful repose of the dead.

For a moment John Walrond started and almost recoiled, but the next he nerved himself to come forward, as he had done in many a scene quite as uncongenial, though never before in one so strange. And an instant's examination showed him that the man was quite unconscious, and that look a mere trick of the imperfect light or a very slight contortion of the muscles.

He recognised the old man, too, as the old gamekeeper whom he had now and then seen before. A respectable-looking woman was busy in a corner of the room—hastily dressed, perhaps, as she had been suddenly called from her bed in the middle of the night, but with a motherly,

comfortable look about her that hardly seemed to suit with the tragedy that had been brought under her roof.

The incongruity was complete when, in a moment or two, her husband came in, respectable, stolid, and bewildered, and after him the young doctor from Colgrave, in a business-like bustle, trying, perhaps, not to seem unprofessionally excited, but making everybody hurry here and there to obey his directions.

Harold stood leaning on the back of a chair, his eyes fixed on his enemy's face, as if some fascination drew and held them there. When the doctor needed a helping hand his was the readiest, and his comprehension the quickest. But anyone watching him closely might have seen a shrinking reluctance in his touch, an unwilling look in those fixed eyes that did not swerve

—the look of one in a terrible dream, from which he cannot break.

The doctor was at first too much engaged to notice who was helping him. He ordered Harold and Bilson about, finding them useful and prompt, and addressed his remarks chiefly to the Mathers, whom he knew slightly, and John Walrond, whom he had seen in Colgrave. But presently, having exhausted his resources, and finding the case sufficiently serious to make him loth to give an opinion, he began to inquire how the accident had happened, and to wonder, too, who his assistants were, and how they came there.

There was a little hesitation over the answers to his questions. The Mathers were evasive and looked at Harold; John Walrond professed not to know anything of the matter, personally, and also looked

at Harold; old Bilson kept a profound silence and looked at nobody; and the doctor, too, looked at Harold, and began to wonder specially who this might be—this handsome young gipsy with the pale face and heavy eyes.

‘I was close by him when it happened,’ said Harold at last, abruptly, and the first tone of his voice made the doctor start and knit his brows in the endeavour to recall some fleeting recollection. ‘He was turning up a steep bank, and his horse fell back upon him. Will he get over it?—that is the important question now.’

He was speaking as to an equal, and the doctor answered in the same tone, while still groping after that elusive remembrance.

‘That is the question, indeed. I could not undertake to answer it without a more thorough examination than I have been

able to make at present. The spine is injured, I fear; and possibly there may be even worse damage done internally. If things are as I think, the end may be a matter of days, perhaps even of hours. I must go back to the town for some things I require, and when I get back I shall be able to judge better.'

'Will he recover consciousness at all?'

It was John Walrond who spoke, thinking, with a mingling of eagerness and nervous reluctance, of the words it would be his duty to say to the dying man in such a case.

'Probably!' answered the doctor, with another curious look at Harold. 'And, now I have done all that I can do at present, the sooner I am gone the sooner I shall be back. Shall you be able to stay here, Mr. Walrond?'

‘I shall remain, for the present.’

‘Well! you have assistants enough. May I speak a word with you privately?’

John would have been glad to decline, but dared not. He, too, glanced at Harold, as if to ask what he ought to say; but Harold was looking again at that still figure, set in the majesty of approaching death, and did not even glance round at him. Unwillingly he followed the doctor to the door.

‘Isn’t that young Malreward?’ asked Dr. Charlton, in an undertone, having carefully closed the door after them, and the other reluctantly answered, ‘Yes!’—wondering whether he did wrong in avowing the fact, but seeing no means of escape.

‘Ha! And the old man?’

‘His name is Bilson. He is a gamekeeper, and lives up in that lodge on Thansley Moor.’

‘Malreward’s keeper? Let me think! There have been some queer stories about!—Mr. Walrond! do you believe that this “accident” has come about by fair means?’

John paused and hesitated, nervously aware all the while that his hesitation was confessing as much as if he had spoken.

‘No!’ he said at last. ‘There has been something wrong—but not in the way you suppose. He was set upon by a gang of thieves, and Mr. Malreward and the other came to his assistance.’

The doctor half whistled.

‘Whose word have you for that?’ he asked. ‘Ah! I see. Well! I am a doctor, not a magistrate, and my first duty is to my patient. But I think you would be right in detaining Malreward and his accomplice.’

‘How could we?’ asked the young

clergyman, simply. 'But I do not think he has any intention of going away, and I am sure your suspicions are unfounded.'

The doctor shook his head, and strode away to where his light dog-cart was waiting for him, under the charge of his sleepy groom. And John Walrond went slowly back to the house, full of perplexity.

There was nothing to be done but to watch, and nothing to hinder the people of the house from going back to their interrupted night's rest. But no one had moved since John went out, until the sound of his entrance startled them into a change of position.

Harold slowly withdrew his eyes from their intent gaze and stretched himself with a weary sigh. And old Bilson looked up at him quickly.

'You're about done up, Master Harold!'

‘Ay! You never saw me so beaten with a day’s shooting, did you? I am going to sleep, and some of you must call me if—anything happens.’

He flung himself down full length on the knitted rug before the fire: and Mrs. Mather came forward, full of remonstrance.

‘Pray you, don’t do that, sir!’ she said. ‘It’s not fit for you. Our bed’s quite at your service. I’ll put it ready in a moment, and the master and I can do very well with the children till morning.’

The young man pillowed his head on his arm and looked up at her with a faint half smile.

‘You’re very good,’ he said. ‘But I wouldn’t stir a yard for the best bed in the kingdom. You and the master had better be off to yours, and rest while you can.’

We have disturbed you enough for one night.'

Perhaps the good woman recognised, with the quickness of her sex, that there was a mystery in the events of that night which she did not understand and had better not meddle with, for she said nothing more.

She brought to Harold the patchwork cushion of the good man's chair, which he accepted and put under his head with a sleepy 'Thank you.' And having provided John Walrond with a chair near the settle and laid a fresh candle in readiness on the mantelshelf, she beckoned aside her silent and wondering husband and carried him off with her up-stairs.

Harold was asleep in less than three minutes. Old Bilson sat silent and motionless, like a faithful and surly watch-

dog. And John took his seat and was silent likewise, deep in thought.

He was thinking uneasily of those suspicions which Dr. Charlton had hinted to him so plainly. Would he think it his duty to act upon them when he got down into Colgrave? Would he set the Law upon Harold Malreward? and if he did, what would be the result? For his own part, John found his thoughts far from consistent. He did not think Harold had lied to him just before, and yet he could not conscientiously have said that he believed the story he had heard. The idea of the young man being not quite in his right mind was the only one that could reconcile these conflicting opinions; but then, on the other hand, John's ideas of mental alienation were rather of the melodramatic order, and did not agree with the profound

calm of that face which rested against the patchwork cushion at his feet.

He left the question of actual guilt or innocence undecided, while he perplexed himself as to what ought to be done.

Was Harold actually liable to arrest? and ought he to be warned of his danger, and urged to save himself by flight? Or could he prove his innocence—granted that he *was* innocent—and would flight only look like the consciousness of guilt?

If the injured man died and made no sign, what witness would Harold have but this old man, who could hardly be supposed to be impartial? Was the father's story to act itself over again in the son, crushing his young life with the burden which the other had not been able to bear? Philip Malreward had had a man's death laid to his door, and had only been

saved from punishment by a witness who—men whispered—was too much bound to him to be altogether trustworthy. Was it to be so with his son, and he to be forever marked to all men's eyes with the brand of Cain, for a deed that perhaps, after all, he was guiltless of?

Slowly John Walrond revolved such thoughts as these; and came but little nearer to deciding what to do. Some men are quick to think though slow to act; but he had never been anything but deliberate in either, and the important issues that he felt to be at stake made him slower than ever. Humbly enough he longed for his father's presence and advice, and even considered with himself for a moment whether it would be possible to send for him, and how soon he might be there. But then, his father was a magis-

trate, he remembered, and though John had often mentally accused him, in trifling cases, of bearing the sword in vain, yet it was not to be supposed that in a case like this he would hesitate to act if he were called upon to do so, however loth.

It was perhaps not a very hopeful idea to appeal for counsel to the old keeper, who from one point of view was no better than a fellow-criminal. But somehow, as he watched the old man's rugged face, fixed in a calm that was not devoid of dignity, with eyes that only moved from that motionless form on the settle to that other figure, almost as still, upon the hearth, John was moved to ask his advice, or at all events his account of the matter.

He had turned towards the old man, and was just about to speak, when an uplifted hand checked the words on his tongue.

‘Hist!’ said the keeper, hastily, in an undertone. ‘Look! sir—I believe he’s coming to himself.’

There was indeed a change upon that face that hitherto had been still as death. The lips, that had been slightly parted, drew together, and the brows contracted a little. The expression changed from the rigid impassiveness of marble to that of one who is dreaming and soon to wake. And presently, as they watched, the steely-blue eyes unclosed, wandered round the unfamiliar, shadowy room, and closed again, as if bewildered or weary.

Evidently the brain was at work once more, and recollection coming back. In a moment more he looked round again, and this time those vague, questioning glances fixed themselves upon the two faces watching his.

‘Who are you? What place is this?’ he asked at last, faintly, but sharply, as if irritated by his own confusion and failure of memory.

The old keeper left John to answer.

‘I am John Walrond, whom you will remember at Deerhurst. And you are at a farmhouse on Calton Edge, where you were brought after—your fall.’

Thornton Harris knitted his brows, as if with an effort at recollection, then lay for a few moments still, looking straight before him.

‘Fall? what fall?’ he said at last, dreamily.

‘You have met with—an accident. You will remember the circumstances presently. For the present you had better keep as quiet as you can. You are well taken care of.’

He listened with a half-dazed, questioning look, like one not yet quite awake. Then presently made—or rather seemed to try to make—some slight, ineffectual attempt to move.

His lips parted with a stifled, inarticulate exclamation; and John Walrond came a little nearer, bending over him anxiously.

‘Are you in pain? Can I do anything for you—lift you into an easier position?’

‘I have not hurt myself! I feel nothing. I shall get up directly! But—— is there any brandy to be had here?’

John Walrond looked about him, perplexed. He knew nothing of the resources of the house; or whether such people would be likely to have any restorative available. Old Bilson put his hand in his pocket and drew out a battered old flask—

looked for a cup—poured something into it, and handed it to him.

Gently enough, but with some nervous shrinking, the young man raised the other's head, putting his arm beneath the pillows, and held the cup to those pale lips.

It was a more potent draught than he would have ventured to administer on his own responsibility ; and it seemed to bring life and recollection tingling back to heart and brain. Harris looked at him with a dawning of purpose and comprehension in his eyes, as if he were only beginning now to understand what had been said to him.

‘Where did I see you last?’ he murmured. ‘Ah! yes,’ and he laughed softly, ‘you were simple enough to take a great deal for granted, but you saved my life!—Surely though!—Calton Edge!—How did I get here?’

Evidently for the moment he had forgotten all that lay between the riot in Colgrave and the present time, and John hesitated, doubtful as to how much it would be well to recall to his mind.

Those coldly-bright eyes, that seemed to contain all the life in the other's frame, moved slowly to the old keeper's face, and fixed themselves there, with a light of dawning recollection in them.

‘Who are you?’ he asked, imperatively.

‘I am George Bilson, Squire Malre-ward's keeper,’ answered the old man. ‘If you'll remember, I and Mr. Harold came up with you to-night on Thansley Moor. He had a thing to say to you, and you wouldn't heed it. Do you remember now?’

Plainly he did remember, at least in part. His face changed slowly, and he

spoke as one who tries to recall a half-forgotten dream.

‘He told me that there was a plot against me—and I believed him there, for I fancied he had the best right to know, being the leader of it! But he told me for a token that Ned Coulson was in it—Coulson, who had some wrongs to revenge, but who has been dead these seven years. How did he know what lay between Coulson and me?’

His eyes, glittering like those of a trapped wild beast, went from one to the other and found no answer in either.

‘Well! I dared not trust him. It seemed at least as safe to go forward as back. But I suppose he meant fairly by me after all, for the next thing I remember they were on me in the narrow way, and I saw him start up at my side, and baulk a blow that

might have settled all scores between us, once for all. It's a queer world.'

'It is that!' answered old Bilson, grimly. 'And queerer than you think. Do you remember what you did next?'

'I—think I do. Coulson—or his ghost—caught at the bridle, and that horse will never bear a strange hand near his head. He reared, and tried to turn—but I think there wasn't room—I don't know what happened after that.'

'The horse fell back on you, that's what happened. And I held back. I've not many years more, in the course of nature, but such as I have I didn't want to fling away, in a dark place, with a wild horse kicking and plunging like mad. But Mr. Harold went straight in, as if you'd been his brother, and somehow or other he got the horse from off you, and on his legs

again. Those rapsCALLIONS had taken to their heels by that time. Then I went to help him, and betwixt us we got you down here.'

Harris had been following the story with strained, fixed attention, and now he closed his eyes as if the effort had wearied him.

'How long is it, since?' he asked.

'Nigh upon four hours.'

'And where is he now?'

'Not far from you, fast asleep on the floor yonder; dead beat with running and riding over the country to catch a man that was off and away, and to speak a word that wasn't heeded after all. Not to reckon, when there was nought else left to be done, going down into Colgrave to fetch doctor and parson, to do what they could do.'

As Bilson spoke, glancing down to where

Harold lay, still sound asleep, the injured man had made an ineffectual effort to lift his head and follow the direction of the old man's eyes. The attempt gave him no pain, simply because the muscles were too completely paralysed to attempt even to obey the will. But John Walrond, watching him anxiously, saw a look of terror come into his face—a look instantly repressed, as it were, and driven back.

‘The doctor?’ he said, speaking more faintly than before. ‘What doctor? Has he been?’

‘Ay! been, and gone. A youngish man. His name’s Charlton, I believe.’

Harris’s eyes were fixed upon the young clergyman’s face; alive with all the concentrated force of his keen intellect.

‘What did he say?’ he asked; and again, with faint yet terrible urgency, ‘What did he say?’

Once more John was in a strait. How dare he tell the man what the doctor had said, unless it had been an absolute certainty? Or, on the other hand, how dare he shorten that time of preparation which would probably be all too short at best?

‘He is coming again. He said he could not pronounce certainly at present,’ he answered at last, his courage failing him.

‘He said more than that! I saw it in your face!’ gasped the other. ‘Did he say why I should feel as much dead, in all but brain, as if I were laid already in my coffin? Would he undertake to say that I had not broken my back, under that accursed bank-side?’

Again John Walrond’s face betrayed him, and told the truth that his tongue dare not speak. He knew that it had done so, by its effect on the face before

him—a look that he never forgot, though he would have given much to forget it.

Often had he spoken of ‘the torments of the lost,’ with a heart kind enough to grieve over them, but with a merciful lack of imagination that prevented him in the least from realising them. Often enough would he use the words again, but never without a shudder of reluctance—a thrill of horror. For always would they recall what he saw then—the look of a lost soul, gazing on him out of the torture-house where its doom was already begun.

He literally dared not speak, and the other seemed to have no more to ask. It was the old man who broke the silence, with that straightforward plain-speaking of the poor that sometimes seems to us brutal, and sometimes merely the most honest and dignified way of facing the inevitable.

‘Doctor’s a careful man,’ he said, ‘and will not speak too plain, any more than the rest of them. But from what he said I judge you’d better be turning your thoughts to what the parson has to say to you. And if there’s aught you want to say to him, in private as it were, I’ll go away out of hearing.’

That marble face changed again during the deliberate utterance of this speech—a change that seemed unnatural, and even terrible, because not a feature moved or a muscle quivered, so that it was as though Life’s passion shone through the transparent mask of Death.

It was a look of relief, and yet not of relief, such as a man might wear who found his doom of unbearable, yet conceivable and comprehensible pain, commuted for an unknown ghastly fear.

But he laughed as the old man ended, a touch of mockery coming uppermost, however dark might be the depths below.

‘I have little enough to say to a “parson,”’ he said, almost lightly. ‘But I suppose he thinks he has something to say to me, or he would hardly have taken the trouble to come so far. Come! Mr. Walrond. After I have seen the doctor again and got my death-warrant, I shall have my own affairs to think of. But, in the meantime, you may say your say, and discharge your conscience.’

He spoke as though conferring a favour, graciously sparing one of his few remaining hours to the consideration of a subject that did not interest him in any way. And John Walrond took up the task with a failing heart, but with a little touch of anger that nerved him to plainness of speech.

Want of plainness of speech is never the fault of his school; and perhaps he felt more free to use the words to which he had been accustomed, and to dwell upon 'the terror of the Lord,' than some others who had a more vivid imagination and keener sympathies. His words were keen-edged enough, and mostly Scriptural. And old Bilson listened approvingly, having his own opinion of the dying man's moral and spiritual state, and taking a grim satisfaction in plain-speaking, even in his own case.

But Thornton Harris was plainly not listening, save with the polite half-attention of a man whose mind is full of something else. And presently even that failed.

'Excuse me,' he said, as John paused for an answer to a somewhat trite, yet

awful and poignant question. 'I—did not quite catch what you were saying. Under such circumstances as mine, a man's own thoughts are apt to press him rather closely.'

'But surely,' said the other, sadly, 'these matters that I have been bringing before you ought to be more pressing and more important than any other thoughts whatever?'

'Possibly, my dear sir! You say so; and it is your business to know. But what ought to be and what is, are two very different matters. Just now I feel more curiosity as to the past, of which it is possible to know something, than as to the future, of which no one knows anything.'

He spoke in a faint, sunken voice, and slowly, as if speech were not altogether easy; but with a hard, indomitable light-

ness that seemed more like the spirit of one of the rebels that fell with Lucifer, than poor human nature in its last extremity.

John Walrond was mute,—dismayed—perplexed.

Some would have tried to follow the current of the man's thoughts, on the chance of turning it by-and-by; but to him that would have seemed mere trifling and temporising, while to speak more strongly than he had spoken already was impossible.

It was to the old keeper that those restless mocking eyes turned, as if with relief.

‘If I understand you rightly,’ he said, ‘that young fellow asleep yonder strained every nerve to save my life. Why did he do that?’

‘Heaven knows!’ said the old man, bluntly, ‘I don’t know that I should have done it, in my own place, let alone in his!’

The other laughed, if that thin ghastly sound could be called a laugh; and turned to John Walrond.

‘And you saw him spare my life that day, when everything was ready to his hand and only you stood in the way. I did not think he had been such a fool!’

‘Doubtless he remembered Who said “Vengeance is mine.”’

‘Possibly! And again I say, I did not think he had been such a fool!’

‘One day, when I were a lad,’ said old Bilson, slowly, ‘I was out with old Squire Harold, his grandfather. A queer chap he was—but better than some that thought themselves good enough. And I caught a snake on a sunny bank, where he’d come out to change his skin. In a forked stick I had him, and I’d soon have put an end to him, but the old squire stopped me.

“Why, master, ’tis an adder!” I said. “I know,” says he, “but it didn’t have fair play. Be it as venomous as may be, it shall have fair play. Let it go!” And I let it go.’

‘I understand the parable,’ answered the dying man, with that terrible little laugh. ‘Would you have told me that story if I had been on my feet as once I was, my candid old friend?’

‘Likely enough I might have spoken just the same, Lawyer Harris,’ said the old man, imperturbably. ‘Or it’s possible I might have put it a bit stronger.’

‘I believe you would. But your story of his grandfather doesn’t quite explain the grandson’s conduct. Truly, it is a very queer world!’

He was silent, while John Walrond tried to collect his scattered thoughts and make

one more appeal, but failed to see where the weak point might be in this armour of the devil's providing.

‘If I could but prevail on you,’ he said at last, ‘to listen to the Gospel, to turn to the Lord ere it be too late——’

‘What then?’ asked the other, sharply.

‘His mercy is infinite. You might yet find space to flee from the wrath to come, though it be but at the eleventh hour.’

‘And what would that be to you?’

‘Should I not rejoice—especially being favoured to be the humble instrument—rejoice in my poor way, even as the angels in heaven do over one sinner that repenteth?’

“Favoured!”—“the humble instrument!” There is nothing queerer in this queer world than the jargon of you religious people! But neither will my theories of

the world and its ways quite explain your actions. I should like to know why you are here, and why you stood beside me against that howling mob down yonder?’

John did not answer. His own doings seemed to him no subject to dwell upon at such a time as this ; and still he did not see the one touch of humanity amid so much that was inhuman.

‘Also,’ went on that faint, thin voice, ‘also, I should be glad to know why that chivalrous young fool turned round and cheated himself out of what I could swear was once his greatest desire ! Lift me up, will you ? I want to look at him. Nay ! you needn’t hesitate. You know well enough that neither that nor anything else will make any difference to me now !’

They did hesitate ; but look and tone were so imperative that there seemed no

choice but to comply. Doubtfully and reluctantly John raised him, aided by the old keeper, and their eyes followed his to where Harold lay stretched upon the rug, the light, such as it was, falling full upon his face, sleeping far too soundly to be disturbed by voices so subdued as theirs, his face as pale and peaceful as a tired child's.

‘He sleeps as well as ever he did at Alston Crucis,’ said Thornton Harris, looking at him with an indescribable mingling of expressions. ‘As well as if he had never to wake. Did his father look like that, I wonder, when he lay dead? Shall I look as peaceful, shortly, in spite of all those pleasant things that you have been promising me?’

Again there was no answer. They would have laid him down again, but that strange, questioning gaze was still unsatisfied.

‘He has beaten me!’ he said. ‘He lies there with all before him, and I lie here at the end of all. But I should like, at least, to know why he did what he did.’

The consciousness of their watching eyes followed Harold, perhaps, into the realms of sleep, and disturbed him for the moment. He stirred upon his hard couch, and his lips moved :

‘All right!’ he murmured ; ‘I promise ! It shall be all right, Elizabeth.’

Thornton Harris took away his gaze at last, and they laid him down.

‘Elizabeth,’ he murmured, significantly. ‘Is not that your sister—the pretty creature who defied me so valiantly ? What is *she* doing in this business ?’

‘I cannot guess,’ said John Walrond, stiffly.

‘What !—not with the handsome face

of such a banished prince before you? I can, though! If the prince could be reinstated! . . . And you tried to save my life, after all! . . . But I don't know that it is worth while—I would sooner leave matters in an imbroglio, if I thought I should see how it would unfold itself after I was gone.'

CHAPTER V.

CONFESSION.

Love, we are in God's hand;
How strange now looks the life He makes us lead,
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are,
I feel He laid the fetter—let it lie!
Andria del Sarto.

THAT night, which had seemed to John Walrond so much longer than any former night of his life, was nearly over. Already a faint grey glimmer was to be seen in the east, and the chill of the last hour before the dawn crept through the room, and made the two watchers shiver as they sat.

Perhaps the dying man felt that chill,

too, numbing heart and brain—felt his soul and senses sinking back into the dark, as the earth, with one slow, continuous effort, rose out of it, and heaved her northern shoulder into the daylight again. He lay still with closed eyes, sleeping, perhaps, or perhaps half unconscious.

And old Bilson looked long at John, and at last rose and came stealthily across the room to him, speaking in a gusty whisper.

‘Won’t you write it down, sir? It is much if he says all that again! All about Mr. Harold warning him, and trying to save him, and how he would go to his death in spite of all. Seems to me it ought to be wrote down.’

The idea commended itself to the young man, so much so that he blamed himself for not having thought of it sooner. And in his neat little pocket-book, among the

records of marriages, burials, and christenings, and frigid little abstracts of Mr. Ravenstone's sermons, he began to note down what he had heard of this coarse, rough-hewn drama, that seemed so out of place there.

Now and then he appealed in a whisper to the old keeper, and found to his surprise that the old man's memory of the actual words spoken was better than his own; and from time to time they both glanced at the lawyer's ashy face upon its pillows, with an unspoken doubt as to whether he would not suddenly look up and mock them both with a denial, or with one word that would change the whole aspect of the matter at once.

No such interruption came, but presently they heard the sound of wheels—heard from far through the deathly stillness of

dawn in those upland solitudes—and John guessed that Dr. Charlton must be returning, and rose up and went out to meet him. He had a vision of the doctor, in his zeal for the Law, bringing back a couple of policemen with him to arrest Harold on the spot, and he was determined that, at any rate, no unpleasant scene should take place for want of the other being aware of the new light that had been cast on the affair since he left. Dr. Charlton was alone, and he had not even driven in at the yard gate when John came out on the doorstep. The young man stood and waited, looking round him in the clear grey solemn light.

How small the little house that held a tragedy looked in the circle of the wild bare hills! Did the tragedy itself look small to any eyes that might be watching out of the

wide, empty heaven? That thought, at any rate, did not trouble John Walrond; his creed—not in other respects a comfortable one—had at least taught him that all the everlasting hills are of less duration and less importance than one human soul.

The doctor arrived and dismounted, and John came forward and told his story, winning the more credence, perhaps, because he told it so badly and so plainly. Then they entered the house, and the doctor, with professional instinct, went straight to his patient. But John looked down at the rug upon the hearth, and started, for the place was vacant and the sleeper gone; and looking round for old Bilson, to inquire the meaning of this, it became evident that he was gone too—when or how did not appear.

The people of the house were beginning

to move about upstairs, but they had heard and seen nothing, and seemed to know nothing of the movement of their late inmates. Only Mrs. Mather, when questioned, smiled an enigmatical smile.

‘Let the young master be,’ she said; ‘I’ll warrant he’ll go where he wants to, and come back when he should.’

‘Do you know him, then?’ asked Dr. Charlton, sharply.

‘Ay! well enough; and his father before him, and his grandfather before that. I’m not sure that I should have taken in *him* yonder if Mr. Harold hadn’t asked it of me; for he’s brought ill-luck to many a door!’

‘Shall I drive you back to Colgrave?’ asked the doctor, presently, returning to the door where John was standing. ‘Their

is nothing to be done for him, I fear, though he will probably live some hours—perhaps, even a day or two. The woman here will do all that can be done for the present, and he refuses to allow anyone to be sent for.’

‘I must go back and see my vicar, and ask leave of absence. I shall be obliged to you if you will drive me down. But I shall return some time to-day, if I can be spared; and I should like to speak to him before I go, if he is able to hear me.’

‘Will you listen to my father, if I bring him to see you?’ asked John Walrond, bending over the dying man. In sooth, he almost blamed himself for this proposal, thinking of his father’s doctrines as he did; but he was at his wits’ end.

‘I think not. What should that fine

old Tory have to say to me?’ answered Harris, slowly, with a faint light of amusement in his eyes. ‘Such men as he are really harder upon men like me than your school is. You think that one instant’s change might make it all right with me; but he—the same heaven would never hold us both! There! go your way, and, if I am still alive when you come again, perhaps I will tell you something that I would never tell to your father.’

Little enough did John say, either to Dr. Charlton or to Mr. Ravenstone, of his hopes and expectations in returning to Harris’s bedside. Perhaps he had very little of either, and was moved rather by common humanity than by what he would have called a higher spiritual desire.

But little hold as he might have upon

this poor soul, lost in the dark, he could perceive that anyone else to whom he might appeal would have less than none; and, at any rate, he was permitted to believe that while there was life there was hope—that, up to the very moment of the latest breath, a word—a thought—might undo the baleful work of years, and alter the destiny of eternity.

There were certain functions of the day for which John was responsible; and, when these were discharged, to hunt up Mr. Ravenstone and partially explain matters to him was a work of time. Then the long vigil of the preceding night, and the prospect of another, made a little sleep desirable, though he was too much excited, in his sedate fashion, to sleep soundly or easily. Altogether it was late in the afternoon when he found himself again on his

way to Calton Edge, wondering vaguely what his strange impenitent would have to say to him, and whether it would affect anyone else's lot.

After all, in spite of his very clear views as to the relative importance of this life and the next, his thoughts were more occupied with Harold Malreward, for whom this world was just opening, than with the man for whom it was just coming to an end.

The young man's abrupt departure had reawakened all John's doubts as to the truth of his story. It seemed only too probable that he had meant harm, if he had not done harm. Some very good, innocent people are apt to be more suspicious—in the case of a bizarre or out-of-the-way crime—than those who really know more of the possibilities of iniquity. To John

Walrond, Bilson's corroboration, and even Harris's confused recollections, seemed very insufficient, and he feared he hardly knew what.

And yet, he was more sorry for Harold Malreward than ever he had expected to be for any unrepentant criminal. Life had been very hard on this young man, who but yesterday, as it seemed, had been master of Alston Crucis, and to-day was nothing and nobody. And how much harder would it be if, in addition to all other misfortunes, he had laid a burden of terrible guilt upon his soul?

Almost with shame, John avowed to himself that he did not want justice; that, guilty or innocent, he wished Harold to escape, to have his share of peace and prosperity in life, in despite of this man who had cursed him by living, and now

was going to ruin him by dying! He hardly knew whether he wished most for his father's advice and help in the matter, or dreaded his hearing of it, as a magistrate, and one bound, perhaps, in some way to take action. He bewildered himself with consideration as to what would be the best to do and what would be safer left undone, and half made up his mind to find his way somehow to old Bilson's cottage, and appeal to him as an accomplice, not only of Harold's, but of his own!

And, meanwhile, the object of all this solicitude was quietly sitting, clothed and in his right mind, in the drawing-room of Deerhurst Rectory. Clothed, that is to say, no longer in picturesque rags, or in the more decent gipsy garb in which he had been seen last, but in the shooting-

suit in which he had disappeared from Alston Crucis : rough and coarse in material, but bearing the unmistakable sign-manual of a tailor who knows his business. And in his right mind, too, which, perhaps, he had hardly been for some weeks past.

Many things had changed their aspect to Harold when he awoke from that sound, well-earned sleep. The fever-dream of vengeance was over. Wisely, or foolishly, he had let his opportunities slip by, and was more glad than sorry, with a gladness that he felt instinctively would last and grow. Christian charity towards his enemy he did not feel, but a kind of shuddering pity that almost excluded hate. He had fancied that he alone was left to fight against this man who had slain his father, and brought about his own ruin ; and the

feeling had sharpened hatred almost into frenzy. And, behold, the stars in their courses had fought against them both; something celestial had robbed him alike of the grosser revenge he had first meant to take, and of the subtler vengeance that would have been as coals of fire on the other's head.

And now, that great storm-cloud of hate having lifted, the rest of the world began to regain something of its normal colour and appearance. The possibility of clearing his father's name no longer seemed utterly desperate. Life, even without name and patrimony, looked blank enough, but not altogether hopeless. And Love, which had betrayed him?—well! he began to say to himself that he had been deceived, and that Love was not everything—being, perhaps, on the point of discovering that

it was a great deal more than ever he had thought it! When a young fellow has been deceived in a woman the damage is never irreparable, unless he has married her; or unless he begins to think that the ideal which he thought to have found in her is nowhere, and does not exist.

Harold had found his ideal again very soon after the loss of it, and little dreamed how much he owed to that fact. While he said to himself, and honestly felt, that his love-time was over, his faith in womanhood was coming back fresh and warm, and other things with it. In fine, life seemed worth living again,—though different enough from what he had once dreamed,—and his dead mother's good name worth fighting for, as well as his father's reputation,—and the world altogether a thing to face manfully, and not to flee from.

Pondering deeply, he let the old keeper draw him from the cottage, where their presence was no longer needed, not unwilling to escape from further speech with anyone there till he had more time to decide upon his course of action, and shrinking from another sight of his vanquished enemy. A plunge in a fresh ice-cold pool of the Calton brook, and a good breakfast at the old keeper's cottage, modified his views even further, and the old man looked at him approvingly as he stood at the door of the cottage, talking cheerily to the dogs as they came up for their morning's greeting.

‘Where off to now, Mr. Harold?’ he asked. ‘I doubt you won’t be wanting to do as you said once, and live up here with me for the rest of your days.’

‘Well! no; I suppose not—though it

might be the best thing for me, after all. But I believe I am going to Parson Walrond's, to give an account of myself and take advice, like a good boy.'

'Not in them clothes, I hope, Mr. Harold?' said the old man, eyeing the gipsy garb with great disfavour.

'Why not? Why shouldn't I go as what I am?'

They looked keenly at each other for a moment, as if there was more in the question than met the ear. Then the old keeper smiled, and shook his head.

'Play-acting—all play-acting—Mr. Harold. A gentleman you were born and bred, and a gentleman you'll be wherever you go, or whatever you call yourself. You can't help that; and don't you forget it, for a gentleman that forgets his calling is like a keeper turned poacher—all the

worse for what he has been ! Go your ways, sir, and make yourself look like a gentleman, and take the parson's advice. No, sir ! I don't want any thanks, nor anything of that sort, as you know well ; only I'd be glad to hear what the parson says. And, as for him up yonder, I'll step up this afternoon or evening, and find out how he goes on, and let you know.'

'The parson's advice,' said Harold to himself, as he went on his way towards another haunt of his, with a view to making that change which his old friend had recommended, which he had half intended to make before. 'The parson's advice ? Is that what I want, or my old play-fellow's ? Well ! I have to keep my promise to her, anyhow, and it's not quite so bad a business as it might have been.'

The stupid housemaid at Deerhurst opened even her dull eyes a little when Harold asked if Miss Walrond was at home. The talk of the country-side had so far impressed her that he was almost the last person in the world she would have expected to admit. But she admitted him without demur, and ushered him into the drawing-room, where Elizabeth was sitting alone.

After all her suspense, and remorse, and self-torment—after a wakeful night and an anxious day—Elizabeth felt a tiny grain of provocation mingling with her intense relief as the young man walked in, safe and nonchalant, looking at first sight much as he had done when she saw him last at Crucis, only a little older than the time that had intervened would account for.

The hand that she held out to him trembled, and she knew that it would not take much to make her cry : and by an impulse of self-defence she became a little cross, even while an involuntary look had betrayed the gladness that was instantly repressed.

‘ I am very glad to see you,’ she said ; and paused, and took her hand away.

‘ Are you ? You looked more startled than glad. Did it frighten you to see me here ?’

‘ No ! I was frightened when you went away ; but I hope there was no need. And now I hope your adventures and troubles are over.’

‘ On the contrary, they are just beginning, I believe ! But first, I am here, according to promise, to tell you what I have done, or, rather, what I have not

done, thanks to you! That is, if you still care to hear?’

‘You know that I care. Only, you surprised me a little, that’s all.’

‘You find me a very unaccountable person? Well, I find myself so now-a-days! But my appearance like this simply means that I have come to my right mind again.’

‘In what respect?’

‘You know,’ he answered, growing graver. ‘You brought me to my senses before it was too late; and so the story I have to tell is very different from what it might have been.’

‘Tell it me,’ she said, softly, bending forward in her low chair, her hands tightly locked together, and her face just a little turned away.

And he told it her, watching, half-

VOL. III. O

abstractedly, the curve of her delicate cheek, and the outline of her slender figure lost in the wide, low seat. Curtly enough he told it; with a certain amount of that pictorial vigour which comes from habits of keen observation, but with some tendency to slur over his own doings. What he had failed to do was more present with him just now than what he had succeeded in doing. And for a moment after he had ended both were silent; he deep in thought, and she afraid to speak because pride and joy had shaken her to the very bottom of her soul.

‘It has—fallen out differently, you see!’ he said at last, still thinking, but thinking aloud. ‘I meant to have killed him! I thought I should not be ashamed of having done it—only a little ashamed of having to tell it to you! And now I come to tell

you how I failed to save him, and am ashamed of that.'

'But not of having tried?—of having risked your own life for your enemy?'

'I don't know what made me do it,' he answered, half-whimsically, but altogether seriously. 'It wasn't at all what I meant! I have to thank *you*, I tell you, that I have been a fool, but nothing worse.'

'You had better thank God! I think you had made up your mind, really, before I saw you.'

For the first time since he had come in she looked at him fully, with soft, shining eyes bright with tears—full of congratulations that she would not trust herself to put into words—full of a sacred joy that no words could have expressed.

And his? Were there really tears in his eyes, too—those fathomless, gipsy eyes

that, as a rule, could keep secrets so well, but that now for a moment let his inmost soul look through them?

‘Thank God, then,’ he said, solemnly. ‘But you, too—from first to last you have helped me. God bless you, Elizabeth!’

That was all. She knew him well enough to guess that he would have no more comments to make on this strange story; nothing more to tell her about it. The details of what he had himself done she would have to find out from some one else. But Elizabeth, too, had her story to tell, and was trying to collect herself sufficiently to tell it.

‘And what do you mean to do, now?’ she asked, at last.

‘What do you advise? You have the

best right to advise me, if you will take the trouble.'

'In the first place, I think you should go back to Crucis; and father thinks so, too.'

'I fear I should. But it will be rather humiliating.'

'And stay there, like a rational being, till matters are settled one way or another.'

'That is reasonable, I daresay; but I think there is only one way in which they can be settled, and I should like—— I care for the place too much ever to want to see it again.'

'But you will stay, and fight it out to the end?'

'I suppose so. But I am not so keen about fighting as I might be otherwise, because—— Well! it is Phil who gains if I lose.'

‘Phil would not think it gain!’

‘No! but right is right. And I believe my father thought that everything was his.’

‘He might have been deceived, as well as everyone else. Wait a minute! Father said I might tell you of something that has come to our knowledge within this twenty-four hours. He said you might be trusted not to build too much upon it. I wrote it down, and he said it was clear. If you read it you will understand it better than if I tell you.’

Elizabeth rose and unlocked a cabinet that stood beside her, and Harold watched her wonderingly, fascinated by that quaint mingling of childlike, eager simplicity and womanly earnestness. She brought to him a document, neatly written on lined paper, and he took it, and her hand along

with it, and held the little hand a moment in his own.

‘I don’t thank you—you see,’ he said. ‘I was always stupid at saying what I feel, and now more than ever.’

‘I don’t deserve any thanks,’ she said, eagerly, as he paused.

‘No? Well! perhaps not,’ he went on, with an odd little smile that covered a deeper emotion. ‘You are made—I won’t say what!—and can’t help it; luckily for the rest of the world!’

She half turned away, almost impatiently. He remembered the paper, opened, and glanced at it; then looked up, with a quick question.

‘Is the woman here, then?’

‘Yes. Ever since we found her, almost dying by the roadside, nearly a fortnight ago, and brought her here. Go on!’

He read on, turning back now and again to read some sentence twice; mastering the meaning of the whole but slowly, as it appeared to Elizabeth's impatience. Important as Mrs. Coulson's confession might be, it seemed to her that she had written it so plainly, so clearly, that its meaning ought to be gathered at one glance. He laid it down at last, and the fierce gleam of his eyes for the moment startled her.

‘I knew it! I was sure of it from the first. And now—— But I can wish him no worse punishment than has come on him already. Only, I shall clear my father's name!’

‘My father said that you were not to feel too sure of it, even now.’

‘What is too sure? Can I believe that all this has been brought to light for no-

thing? I don't believe it; and you don't, either. My father's name will be cleared! And, as for him, God has judged him and doomed him already. Once I should have grudged that he should escape his lawful punishment—but not now.'

He was silent a moment, resting his chin upon his hands, the fierce glow of triumph dying out of his face.

'I wonder if this means name and fortune for me, as well as justice for my father?' he said at last, musing aloud. 'If I had killed him, or even connived at his being killed, this news would have come too late for me! Elizabeth, did you know of it when you sent me off yesterday?'

'Yes,' she answered, blushing in sweet confusion.

'Should you have told me, if I had declined to go otherwise?'

‘I—suppose so.’

‘But you didn’t! Well, I am glad you didn’t.’

‘And I—am glad there was no need to tell you. Are you?’

‘I am not sorry. Ah! here is your father.’

A moment later and Elizabeth, too, heard her father’s step. Harold rose to meet him, with a little smile at the corners of his lips, and a boyish, half-ashamed look as if he rather dreaded those keen, kindly eyes.

‘At last!’ said Mr. Walrond, rather severely, but taking the young man’s hand in both his own with a certain fatherly air of possession. ‘My-dear boy, why didn’t you come here before, as you promised?’

‘Because I wanted to make a fool of myself!’ answered Harold, guiltily. ‘And I thought——’

He paused, and the rector laughed, grimly.

‘ You thought you could do that without advice or assistance? Likely enough! And what do you mean to do now?’

‘ In the first place, to return your mare, which I borrowed in rather a hurry yesterday, and to tell you what I did with her.’

‘ Ah? I had half forgotten her. To tell the truth, I was more anxious to hear of your safe return than even of hers. Sit down, now, and let me hear of your doings. As to the future, I hardly know what to think; but any help that I can give, you shall not need to ask for.’

CHAPTER VI.

A CONFESSION.

*Thou, that ownest the soul,
Yet wilt not grant control
To another, nor disallow——*

· · · · ·
God help all poor souls lost in the dark.

R. BROWNING.

‘So you have come back?’ said the dying man, looking up into John Walrond’s grave, perplexed face, with that terrible lightness that seemed defiant alike of mortal weakness and mortal fears. ‘I never knew one of your cloth who could keep away from a death-bed. But I fear I shall

not make what you would call an edifying end.'

'I should not expect that,' answered John, with his blunt, child-like directness. 'But if I could hope to bring you to any degree of penitence, to throw yourself upon the mercy of Christ and trust in His merits even at the very last——'

He stopped, abashed, in spite of his utter honesty, by a sinister look that stole into the eyes that were watching his face beneath their half-fallen lids.

'*Is it that you want? Or a confession from me; something that may affect the fate of—some one with whom you may be connected some day?*'

Perhaps John was hardly quick enough to realise all that this might imply. Certainly he answered with more dignity than curiosity.

‘Any confession that you may make, any proof of penitence that you may give, is likely to affect *your* fate more than that of anyone else.’

‘You think so? Strange! the inconsistencies of men. *You* would call a man like me a vessel of wrath and a child of hell, and yet believe that a moment or so might change all that. And your father would say tolerantly that I had not behaved quite like a gentleman, not having been to the manner born; but in his heart—! Come, in reward for your superior charity, I will tell you a very curious fact, one that will come in usefully in your future clerical career.’

His voice was very thin and low, so thin and toneless that the other had need to listen attentively to catch every word. But he spoke without apparent difficulty,

and even, as it seemed, with a certain satisfaction in using the one power of motion still left to him. Or, perhaps, in a man who had been theatrical all his life, the satisfaction even then lay in feeling that he was about to shock and astonish his hearer.

‘You know your Bible, of course, Mr. Walrond? So did I once! There is one chapter to which I still attach some interest, because I find there the account of a case very like my own. I mean the fifth chapter of St. Mark, somewhere about the ninth verse.’

John Walrond’s slow, tenacious memory laboriously brought back to him, as out of a well-furnished but ill-arranged library, the chapter and its contents. And with that he started and looked questioningly at those strange, half-closed eyes that

never swerved from their fixed gaze. Was it madness that glittered in them, or something worse?

‘Ah! you understand me, I see. You have often heard me called wicked, no doubt? And sometimes, I daresay, you have heard me called mad. But I am not mad; and whether I am wicked you may judge when you have decided how far that man was responsible for what the *Legion* said and did in him.’

‘I—I cannot think that I understand you rightly,’ faltered John Walrond. He would have thought the man was jesting, but that he could not conceive of any sinner so hardened as to jest upon such a subject on his deathbed.

‘Yes, you do! You can’t take me too literally.’

‘Do you mean, then——’

‘ I mean that I am *possessed* ; that there is a devil in me, over and above that share of original sin that you say we all inherit. That there have been times when he has spoken through me, and acted through me, though whether against my will or not I cannot tell you. That half my life has been spent in trying to make the best of things that *he* has done, to carry out schemes on lines that *he* has laid down, and that he and I between us have made not such a bad thing of it, until last night ! And whether the folly that brought about *this* end of it was his or mine is again more than I can tell you.’

John *had* heard Thornton Harris called mad. Till now he had never believed it, but at this moment he began to do so. And yet again his preconceived ideas of madness did not agree with the marble

calmness of those features and the keen, mocking glance that seemed to be saying all the while, 'Are you fool enough to believe all this? *I do!*'

A shudder ran through him, not unobserved by those watching eyes.

'The question is,' went on the faint, insistent voice, with a subtle change in its tone, 'will this partnership, for which I may or may not be responsible, be broken when soul and body part company? And, if so, where shall *I* go when the body goes to the dust, and *he* to his own place?'

He was certainly not mocking now! Whether or not he was in his right mind was not so easily settled. His hearer had no time to settle the question even had he been able, but by a sudden flash of inspiration it seemed right to him to answer

the mad according to his madness, if mad he were.

‘That depends,’ he said, ‘upon how far you have endeavoured to separate yourself from him and from his doings in the meantime.’

Was it a look of disappointment on that impassive face? Had he expected dumb astonishment and horror instead of this suggestion of repentance,—adroit, considering from whom it came? If so, he did not betray himself, save by that hardly perceptible look. He closed his eyes, as if in weariness, and lay silent for a moment or two, then abandoned the subject with an ease and suddenness that was either a wilful recoil from the practical hint just given or a sure sign of a mind unhinged.

‘What has become of that young fellow

who was here last night, who is either Malreward or not, as I—as Fate shall choose?’

‘I wish I knew!’ answered John Walrond, gravely.

‘What is he going to do with himself?’

‘Again, I wish I knew! His is a most painful and anomalous position. I don’t know what he *can* do.’

‘He can play gipsy uncommonly well! It pleased me to see him do it. But I suppose it was hardly likely that he would settle down to that for life! That day in the market-place at Colgrave I thought he would have made an end of the farce, and of me at the same time—— Now! if I thought I should live to go through with it, I should like to see what would happen if I laid last night’s business at his door! Magistrates and public may be made to

believe *anything*; and, after all, that is more likely than what he actually did do !'

An involuntary exclamation of horror from his companion made him pause and look up.

'It was my bosom-friend who suggested that, not I !' he said, without the slightest change of tone. 'And I am in no position to carry out the suggestion now, whatever I might once have done.'

'For God's sake !—for pity's sake !' cried John Walrond, desperately, 'if you really believe as you say, what need is there for any words of mine? What condemnation could be deeper than is yours already, unless you come to Him who alone can set you free? Doubtless the devil tempts you, as he tempts all of us; but for what, unless it is to sink you to his own depth of sin and despair?'

‘Does he tempt *you*, in the *same* way?’ asked the other, with that keen sidelong glance. ‘And have modern apostles the power to cast out devils?’

‘They do not need it! You may go direct to Him who cast them out of old.’

‘I might—or might not—if I were a free agent! That is all an old story, as you truly observe. And even then He came to *them*, not they to Him; and they cried out, *What have we to do with Thee?* Oh, I told you that I knew my Bible well enough!’

Again his eyelids fell and he was silent, while that absolute stillness, except when he was speaking, made him seem as if dead already. If John had been more imaginative, he might have thought of the ghastly old story of an evil spirit taking possession of an unburied, unhouseled corpse, but he was more than sufficiently

perplexed and distressed without that. And presently the dying man laughed softly to himself, a little laugh of malign enjoyment that barely curled his pale, thin lips.

‘I wish I knew which would be best!’ he said. ‘But perhaps that may be as good a way as any! You see, I cannot help thinking that I shall live, somehow, as long as the confusion lasts that I shall leave behind me,—as long as there are questions, and doubts, and quarrels, and unforeseen developments. When everything settles down quietly and is forgotten, then I shall be dead indeed! So I have resolved, I think, what to do.’

He paused, but the other only waited silently, not knowing in the least what to expect, yet taken by surprise when next he spoke.

‘ Will you send, at once, for your father ?’

‘ I can do so,’ answered John Walrond, ‘ but I understood you to say that you did not wish to see him.’

‘ Oh ! you need not be jealous for your charge of my spiritual state ! I only want him as a *magistrate*. And send at the same time for Chapman, my partner down at Colgrave, and for—the young man who used to call himself Malreward.’

‘ I do not know where he is. And, if you have any such design against him as you spoke of just now, I should not consent to send for him.’

‘ Old Bilson, the keeper, will know where he is. And how do you know what I want him for ?’

‘ I do *not* know. But I will not send for him unless you give me your word that you mean him no harm.’

‘I can easily give you my word, but the devil in me will do and say what *he* pleases when it comes to the point. Moreover, if he puts the matter before your father and Chapman in the proper light, it will be their business to find the young man whether he is sent for or not. I should like to see him again before I go. I should like to see his face when the tables are turned in that fashion!’

A more quick-witted man than John Walrond might well have been puzzled to know whether he was in jest or earnest, whether he meant good or ill.

‘I don’t understand you,’ he answered, doggedly. ‘I shall take no steps unless I can be sure of your intentions.’

Again the other laughed that eldritch laugh.

‘Mr. Walrond, *dare* you baulk a dying

man of his last wish ? But I will not ask you to take any responsibility. Will you kindly call the woman of the house to me, and you need not even hear what I ask of her.'

'My father will be here,' said John to himself. 'He will never dare to lie to my father's face, even if he *is* possessed. But there shall be no message sent to Harold Malreward until I see how things go. I fear that sending for the partner means no good.'

After all, matters did not fall out altogether as John Walrond had feared, any more than as he had intended. On this second visit of his, perplexity and dismay had almost made him forget that he was dealing with a man whose hours were numbered. So much vitality of malice, if not

of wickedness, had made fear almost supersede pity. But shortly after Harris's interview with Mrs. Mather, some change—they knew not what—some inward failure of strength—took him perceptibly a stage farther on his dark journey. For his own part he abandoned his mocking lightness of speech and manner and lay silent, evidently husbanding his scanty remains of strength. And the young clergyman watched beside him, reading and praying at intervals as he would have done by any other dying sinner, doubting how far he heard or heeded, but resolute to seize every opportunity to plead *for* him, since to plead *with* him seemed hopeless.

The night wore on ; the doctor came and went, dropping a significant hint that if his patient had anything to attend to it had better be done at once. And shortly

after he was gone came Mr. Chapman, a ferret-faced individual with an obsequious manner, who began, with every expression of regret, to offer his services to arrange any little matter of business, and to hint that there were matters upon which he should be glad of a little information—if they might be alone together? With that he glanced at John Walrond, and was briefly ordered by his partner to hold his tongue, and to get paper and pen in readiness to take notes of an important statement.

‘To be made to this reverend gentleman?’ asked Chapman, eyeing John once with much disfavour.

‘Wait and see,’ answered Harris, curtly, and so closed his eyes and lay silent, as if determined to waste no word more.

He had not looked up nor spoken again,

three hours after, when there was a sound of wheels outside, and in a few moments Mr. Walrond entered the room, his ruddy, eagle-face grave and set, as if the errand on which he had come had sobered it down from its wonted imperious joviality.

The dying man opened his eyes, and met defiantly that keen, judicial look. But they swerved from the rector's face, looking rather at something beyond and behind him, and a flash leaped out of them that might have been triumph or merely surprise.

‘*You* are there, then?’ he said. ‘You have found me, my enemy?’

Mr. Walrond glanced back over his shoulder, and Harold came slowly forward out of the darkness behind him, pausing at the foot of the couch and looking down with grave, considering eyes.

‘I have been your enemy, Mr. Harris,’ he said, ‘and you—mine. That is why I am here, that if you choose we may exchange forgiveness before you go.’

‘At least I never sought *your* life!’

‘No; but, if I sought yours, you know why. And you know that at the last I tried to save you. God shall judge between you and me.’

‘So be it. But—you are no longer a gipsy, I perceive. Have Bolingbroke and your step-mother given up the rightful heir’s cause so easily?’

‘Nothing is yet settled, as I think you know. If my brother is really the rightful heir, I shall be very willing to acknowledge him.’

‘Ah, well! Sit down all of you, and listen. The game is lost; and there is a certain satisfaction in showing the cards

and discussing the fall of them. And there is a satisfaction, too, in knowing that, however things go, some one's expectations must be disappointed . . . Chapman, be ready to take down what I say . . . John Walrond, if you will sit where I can see you, there will be the more chance of my speaking the exact truth.'

In deep amazement, John obeyed him; taking a seat beside that which his father had drawn forward, while Chapman remained beside the table on which he had spread his writing materials, and Harold stood motionless where he was, leaning against the end of the high-backed settle.

'I speak to you in especial, Harold Malreward,' went on the dying man, his eyes moving slowly from one to another, and resting at last on that still intent face opposite to him. 'I will be brief, for my

story may easily be longer than the time I have to tell it in, and, what is more, I have neither repentance nor regret to express . . . Twenty years ago, when your mother died, my late partner, Samuel Crofton, and I came into possession of certain facts that seemed to affect the legality of her second marriage. Her first husband's death had never been proved; and when a man wrote to us calling himself Thomas Collingwood, being evidently in possession of facts that we thought only Collingwood had known—out of which, by-the-by, he proposed to make a good thing out of us—we really supposed at first that it might be he. But we had both known Collingwood well, and an interview showed us that this was not the man, but one of his comrades. The claimant soon confessed as much, and told us

the time and manner of Collingwood's death, which you will find put down, along with other matters, in a place that I will tell you of . . . It seemed to us both that something might be made of this. The plan was mine, but Crofton's children would be the gainers ; and my reward was not fixed upon. I preferred to leave it to chance, and to his fears ; and I had besides private grudges of my own to consider, upon which I need not dwell now. The marriage certificate was, of course, genuine, and later the certificate of the death of the pseudo Thomas Collingwood, who for reasons of his own personated his old friend till the day of his death. Other touches I intended to add to the evidence, some of which I destroyed ; and one—a partial failure—appeared with unexpected effect at my examination, though

how it got into your hands I never quite understood. It ought to have ruined me. Any fool ought to have seen that it was not genuine, and that if genuine it could not possibly have been in my partner's possession. But the devil stood by me, and got me off.'

His eyes turned with a significant look to John Walrond, and he paused as if the thread of the story was for the moment lost.

'Where was I? Oh!—We were in no hurry. We were afraid of forcing your father's hand, lest he should do, what after all he did without our interference—marry again. That and your half-brother's birth overthrew all our plans. Crofton's children were no longer the next heirs after you. But the story was still a good one, and many unforeseen contingencies might oc-

cur. My idea was to deal with you as soon as you should have money or influence in your power. Crofton had other ideas, as I discovered at last.'

Again his eyes wandered, and his thoughts seemed to wander with them. It was as if the story, for him, was written on Harold's intent, unchanging face, and when he saw that no longer it grew confused and dim.

'Give me some brandy, or something to keep the life in me,' he murmured, 'I am making this as short as I can, but it is a shame to slur such a story . . . Well, it seemed long to wait, I suppose, and Philip Malreward seemed likely to live as long as either of us. I, for one, grew tired of the scheme, or half forgot it.'

John Walrond had drawn near to give the restorative for which he had asked, and

the dying man's looks turned upon him with a sudden change in them.

‘If Crofton’s death does lie at my door, I care very little about it,’ he said, in a hurried half-whisper. ‘He deserved it, if ever man did. But did you ever hear of a man being such a fool as to die of a false suspicion? He knew I had done it, but he dared not speak: and he died. It was no fault of mine, I say. Could I shut men’s mouths, or make him as thick-skinned as a man should be to get through this world comfortably?’

He looked round upon them all with a ghastly smile, and, finding nothing in all those watchful eyes but grave attention, went suddenly back to his story, with an air of having left something unsaid that had been just upon his lips.

‘Next came to our knowledge, privately,

the discovery of coal in the Aldersford valley. The man who found it out played us both false ; told it to each of us, promising to keep it secret from the other. Crofton laid his plans to get possession of Benson's farm, unknown to me. I saw my way to buying Dent's land next to it, unknown to him. I wondered why Crofton should try every trick he knew to prevent your father from paying off the mortgage within the time. But it was paid at the last moment, and I received the money, having by that time a suspicion of the truth, that made me very ready to do so. I did not see Crofton again till after he had been over to Crucis, and was on his way back, baffled and mad with rage He let out then why he had been so keen to secure Benson's land, and I saw that he stood in my light. The fool owned, too, that he had made use of

our secret, and risked ruin for both of us, merely on the chance of threatening Philip Malreward into parting with the farm . .

Then I saw that there was no room for us to work together any more. We quarrelled desperately, raking up everything we knew against each other—a goodly catalogue! And then—you know what happened. Your gipsy informant has got it all very correctly—wonderfully so, considering all things I don't repent; why should I? It was the devil in me that did it, not I. He never tempted me to kill before, or since; and he could hardly have chosen a better victim.'

The last words were addressed apparently to John Walrond, and the rector made an involuntary movement and turned to his son as if for explanation. For the first time the dying man addressed him directly.

‘ You believe in the devil of scripture, Mr. Walrond, but I daresay you never had any dealings with him personally. Your son there talks fluently enough of striving with him and being tempted by him, but does not in his heart believe my account of my own case, any more than you would. No matter ; it is no one’s business but my own, after all. I will finish my story : and since your son saved my life once, and has a fancy that confession is a good thing, he shall hear me confess before you all Listen then, and you, John Walrond, will understand the meaning of the form in which I put it It was my hand that arranged and forged the evidence that impugned Philip Malreward’s first marriage It was my hand that struck the blow that killed Samuel Crofton It was through me that the suspicion of his murder fell upon Philip Malreward

By my influence the woman Coulson perjured herself to clear me, when I had been charged with the crime . . . And, finally, through me the forged letters and the genuine certificates found their way to Miles Bolingbroke and his acute legal advisers, and inspired them with a conviction that I have always regarded as the greatest of compliments.'

He spoke with long pauses between each sentence, perhaps giving them time to follow him, perhaps feeling the inroads of mortal weakness, which yet he seemed to scorn. His look turned towards the glass that stood on the table, and John raised his head and held it to his lips; and then his eyes closed and he lay silent.

It was Mr. Walrond who spoke first, in deep ringing tones, that even pity could hardly subdue.

‘God help you, and make you more penitent than as yet you seem to be, for never man had greater need.’

‘When your son has decided upon the extent of my responsibility, I will decide as to the amount of repentance I should feel . . . Chapman, have you written down all that is necessary? In my private safe you will find the paper—and memoranda; these gentlemen will no doubt make it worth your while to produce them! . . . I claim the less credit for a full confession because at my death you would probably have discovered the secret and made your own market of it Harold Malre-ward, you spoke a little while ago of forgiveness. Can you forgive *now*?’

In their horror of curiosity the others had almost forgotten the momentous consequences of this confession, and all that

it meant to one there present. But now the two Walronds and the attorney suddenly bethought themselves of Harold, and turned to see how he bore himself under the shock of this disclosure.

‘Like a gentleman!’ thought the rector, noting with stern approval the thoughtful, stoical calm of the young man’s face. ‘I’ll be bound he took ill fortune so, but good fortune is a sharper test.’

‘You have cleared my father,’ Harold was saying slowly; ‘all here present understand that?’

‘Ay, that story is clear—or soon will be—and much else besides . . . I see his face between my eyes and yours, as I saw it last, with despair in it and death How could I know that it would kill him? . . . Forgive me, or not, but go; and take that phantom with you. It is my turn to die now.’

The thin, toneless voice had sunk into a whisper that would have been inaudible if the room had been less deathly still. The eyes had lost something of their baneful brightness, but were fixed on some point just short of Harold's face, with a desperate eagerness that belied his words.

‘My father would have forgiven his worst enemy in such a case as yours,’ said Harold, still slowly. ‘I—it is harder to forgive for him. But I must, since he is not here to speak. God forgive you, as he would, and as I do.’

He turned and went away, passing noiselessly out into the night; and the strained look that had been turned towards him relaxed, and a faint half sigh was heard through the silence.

‘The other has gone too,’ he murmured. ‘Shall I meet him again, I wonder?’

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‘Chapman, read over what you have written. I cannot sign ; but you may call in the people of the house to hear it, and to hear me swear to it, as my full and true confession.’

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‘Now go ! . . . Mr. Walrond, we have nothing to say to one another. I have no conscience, but I can guess what you think of my doings, and what pity and contempt together would keep you from uttering . . . John Walrond, if you like to stay, and try, at the eleventh hour, to pray a soul up out of the nethermost pit, you may do so. I will not discourage you. I have nothing more to say, to friend or foe.’

Stumbling out into the dark, Mr. Walrond came upon Harold Malreward, sitting motionless on the low wall of the farm-yard,

just before the house door, his arms folded, his head just visible against the dark night sky.

Between awe and horror and relief, the Rector of Deerhurst was in no hurry to speak, and found the young man's conduct so commendable that he simply imitated it, and sat down on the wall beside him without a word.

Silently, and yet in sympathy, they watched the dawn broaden and brighten in the sky; an almost cloudless dawn, that might have suggested the strange old Scripture words, 'The body of heaven in his clearness.'

Strangely enough they were both thinking more of the past than of the future; of things in the soul and life of man that hitherto had had no place in their simple out-of-doors philosophy. They were both

simple souls, though educated gentlemen ; and never of themselves might have caught a glimpse of that dark pit which had opened before them that night.

Who shall say what they mused upon it, in simple, boyish fashion, the elder man as well as the younger ? The thoughts of such men are a far greater mystery than those of the rest of us, who are sophisticated enough to analyse and wonder over our own sensations. A mystery even to themselves, but they are apt to act upon them, as we others do not always.

‘ Harold, my lad,’ said Mr. Walrond at last, when the sky was blue in the east before them, ‘ I needn’t tell you how glad I am. I am thinking how glad your father would be if he knew.’

‘ I believe he does know,’ answered

Harold, softly, and left his own gladness to be inferred from his tone.

‘Well,’ said his companion, after another pause, ‘we may as well be moving. You were about done up when we started out, my boy. How do you feel now?’

‘Like Esau,’ said the young man, with a half-smile, ‘as though I would give up Crucis again for a bed, and a good long sleep in it.’

‘I had always a liking for Esau,’ answered Mr. Walrond, picking his way across the yard, ‘and you and he have a good deal in common. But Master Phil will not play Jacob. Come along, and we will find you a bed, and some breakfast too, without bargaining for your birthright.’

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE GARDEN.

‘ When earthly things, made even,
Atone together.’

How the birds sang in the rectory garden at Deerhurst on that spring day, which had begun in such solemn clearness, and went on with unclouded sunlight from beginning to end !

It seemed to Elizabeth that the birds’ song had never been so blithe before ; as she flitted about like one of them, hushing the wonted sounds of household life, and

keeping guard over the slumbers of those two upstairs.

Little enough had they told her, when they arrived at home in time for a late breakfast, subdued and weary, more inclined to eat than to talk, and more ready to sleep than either.

But she contrived to gather that all was well; and, indeed, had less to check her rejoicing than she would have had if they could have brought themselves to tell her more details of the scene they had passed through.

Her hero had behaved himself not unheroically, that was the first and greatest cause for gladness; and she liked him none the less because he was not very ready to talk about it.

Secondly—and the order in which these things occurred to her was characteristic

and significant—secondly, he was safe out of all his dangers for the present.

And thirdly, if all went well, he would get back his name, and his place, and his property; and the name untarnished, as he had risked so much to prove it.

Many girls would have gone farther, and in all maidenly modesty have been ready to share the prosperous future with the Prince whose weary weird seemed in a fair way to be ended. But Elizabeth was a long way from that as yet.

She was more glad than words could say that virtue had triumphed; but prosperity did not interest her as adversity had done. She was far too young and unworldly to look upon her own future as a thing to be thought of and settled. In a certain way she knew that she loved Harold Malreward, but in her innocent

ignorance she fancied that so long as he was happy she should not mind what he thought of her; and that when he once enjoyed his own again his future would never be as much to her as his past had been.

Mr. Walrond made his appearance first, perhaps because he had missed only one night's rest instead of two; or perhaps because he had less of the convenient faculty of sleeping at any time as well as in any place.

He was more communicative than before, and from him Elizabeth learned all that he thought well for her to know—enough of the story to complete and explain what she had heard already, and to fill her with pitying horror as well as with thankfulness.

And nurse meanwhile was breaking gently to Mrs. Coulson the news that her protector and tyrant was dying, or more probably already dead; and hearing from her in return a tale which she was resolved should never come, in all its details, to her young lady's ears. Had the poor creature been calm, nurse would never have heard it, but now in her relief and dismay it all came out.

How Harris had beguiled her from her husband, years before; and how she had persuaded him of her husband's death, hoping that he would marry her, as he promised. How she had bribed her husband to secrecy, and how he had taken the wages of his own shame, and yet hated Harris all the time, and plotted to be revenged on him. How Coulson had watched over all Harris's movements with jealous

hatred, and, falling in with young Squire Malreward, had joined himself to him and told him all he knew, and sworn to help him, simply because he too was against the lawyer.

And so on, with reminiscences of the night of Crofton's murder, and all Harris's evil deeds from first to last—things to which nurse would gladly have lent an attentive ear two days before, but which jarred now even upon her homely susceptibilities, as spoken of one who, by this time, was probably gone to answer for them before the Judge of all.

Nevertheless, nurse made notes in her own fashion, that is to say on the tablets of her excellent memory; and hoped most devoutly that 'master' would be able to get the young squire his rights again.

'Dark and fair—that's how it should be,'

she said to herself, enigmatically. ‘And one that speaks the truth and does what he ought, by all that I can learn. And a place and a name good enough even for my dear, if villains don’t cheat him of them—which surely master will never let them! And not the same first letters to their names, nor anything unlucky of that kind . . . There they are in the garden now—as pretty a pair as anyone need wish to see! . . . Bless your sweet innocence, Miss Elizabeth! if *you* don’t know what it means when a handsome young gentleman looks at you like that, your old Nanna does!’

The afternoon was well advanced when Harold at last made his appearance, looking all the better for his long sleep—awake, in fact, which he had hardly seemed

to be before—and with a colour in his smooth brown cheeks.

Finding no one in the drawing-room or in the rector's study, he passed on through the hall into the garden, where he found Elizabeth hard at work.

‘Father has gone to take the dogs out for a walk,’ she told him. ‘He said he was good for nothing else.’

‘I am good to help you, if you will let me,’ said Harold, in a business-like tone. ‘Will you kindly give me that spade? No woman could ever dig properly yet!’

‘I don’t believe *you* can! I don’t think you ever tried before, since you gave up your own garden on the lower terrace, that Phil showed me.’

She had returned to her wonted spirits, with the lifting of the cloud that had hung

over her companion; and attacked him with the elfish teasing grace of their first meeting in their grown-up days. And gladly Harold caught the tone and let it bridge for him the gulf of time—not in reality so very wide, but bottomless—that parted that day from this. He had cause enough for thankfulness and relief in the thought of all that had come and gone since then; but he did not want to think of it just now, though the feeling of it lay like a bright background to all his thoughts.

‘I can dig, like any day-labourer!’ he answered, promptly. ‘I did three days’ digging not long ago, and was considered worth average wages, in a potato field. Not that I consider a flower-garden worth all this trouble! The woods are far prettier, and the flowers there grow of them-

selves. What are all these dead things in the way?’

‘They are not dead! and you are not to disturb them on any account! You are so dreadfully strong—you are not fit to be trusted in a flower border! Besides, I had dug so much and so well that the border was just done, and I was going to put my tools away.’

‘Really? Or only to keep me from doing mischief?’

‘Really! Doesn’t it look as though I had done a great deal?’

‘As though an industrious little bird had been scratching at it! Come, though, where do these things want to go?’

‘That is how I was brought up to speak! I was forgetting it down there in the south. How they laughed at me for saying that a borrowed-book wanted to go

home! Come! these things want to go into their own shed, which is down here.'

'I remember this shed!' said Harold. 'What was there about it?—oh! I recollect. I locked you up in it once, as a prisoner taken in a raid on some imaginary enemy's country. My father was over here, seeing your father, just before you went away. And you pretended distress so well that the servants came indignantly and rescued you, and I expected a complaint to the authorities. But nothing ever came of it. Where was your brother in those days?'

'I don't remember. But I suppose he must have been with my mother. You know she almost always had to be away; till at last we left too.'

They had wandered on along the path

at the bottom of the garden, and almost reached that door into the lane by which Harold had entered, two days before. And there they stopped short, and looked at it, and at one another, and grew suddenly serious.

For a few minutes neither spoke, and when Harold broke the silence at last it was not with anything that might seem to refer directly to what was in both their minds.

‘I shall stay here to-night if you and your father will have me. And to-morrow morning I will go back to Crucis, with very different feelings to those I expected yesterday to have had. I must see Mr. Bolingbroke first, and then perhaps I may venture to write to Phil, and gladden his heart by telling him that his chances of a landed estate are but small! Is it not

a blessed thing to be sure that that *will* gladden his heart?’

‘He wouldn’t be what I think him if it wouldn’t!’ answered Elizabeth, emphatically.

‘And then—as soon as I feel myself firm in the saddle again—Are you tired of giving me good advice, Elizabeth?’

‘No! But you frightened me last time, or rather made me frighten myself. Please don’t let it be anything of that sort again.’

‘It is nothing of that sort,’ he said, and paused: in what was, for him, confusion. Elizabeth stole one glance at him and saw that he blushed, and in pity took her eyes away again.

‘Put yourself in my place,’ he said, hesitating. ‘You can do it, I know. Suppose you thought you had lost everything, and, being desperate, rather lost your head

as well ; and so went to—some person—with whom you had a connection, and pointed out that you were nothing, and *had* nothing, and so the connection could no longer be said to exist ! And suppose she, or he, or whoever it was, took you at your word ?’

The blush had faded now ; his lips closed sharply over the last word. In the very guardedness of his speech, it was plain that the bitterness of that hour lingered yet.

‘ Well ?’ said Elizabeth, softly, after a moment.

He drew a long breath, and began in quite a different tone, as if forcing himself to take another view of the matter.

‘ It was—not quite fair, perhaps. It was raising a question that never need have been raised, putting her to a test that I had no right to expect anyone to

stand. If I had not done it, I should never have known; but I know now, and I am afraid I shall never forget, or—quite—forgive.’

Elizabeth took a side-glance at his face, and did not doubt that he spoke the truth. He did not look very likely to do either.

‘But I might try,’ he went on, with an odd kind of grim simplicity. ‘That is not the point, after all. The whole affair having been a mistake, the question is whether I am not bound to treat it as such; or, at any rate, to leave it to her to decide again?’

Elizabeth understood him very well, but she was in no hurry to answer him.

She was thinking of a certain rumour that had reached her, and of nurse’s caus-

tic comment thereon. 'Colvins aren't good blood enough to be true to them that are in misfortune.'

She did not believe that Miss Colvin had actually engaged herself to young Cavenham so soon. But certainly there was something in the story. Did Harold know it? Would it be fair to him to let him go on and act in ignorance of it, or fair to her to tell him of it? Honour was taking him back to her, but would honour make her send him away again? or had women like that any honour?

Was she always fated to send this young man forth on doubtful, dangerous quests? to know more about his own affairs than he did himself, and to feel bound to hold her peace?

Never again could Elizabeth flatter herself that Harold's doings in future would

be of little interest to her. It would be wronging her to call it *jealousy*, the pang that went through her proud young heart at the thought of that girl being offered again the gift that she had flung away; and possibly, after due thought, accepting it. It was too pure, too unselfish to call jealousy, but it opened her eyes nevertheless.

Truly, in any case, apart from her own personal share in the matter, it was bad enough to think of a man's heart and life being laid at the disposal of a woman whom he could 'never quite forgive.'

And perhaps Elizabeth, being a woman, would not of herself have thought that honour required the sacrifice. But none the less would she turn a deaf ear to that tender longing of her own that cried out against it. It was no question of herself

or of what she wished, but of that other girl's rights, which possibly she had not forfeited, and of Harold's duty.

And Harold was waiting all this while for an answer; glancing down at her at last with eyes that asked why she was silent so long.

'You ask me hard questions,' she said at last, 'and I think, as usual, you have made up your mind already.'

'Have I? But I want to know what you think.'

'I think that no one could decide for anyone else in such a matter as this. And I think, too, that I dare not advise anyone not to act upon his own notions of honour, whether they were the same as other people's or not.'

Harold started, and his face darkened a little.

‘Some one said that, once before!’ he said, after a moment, rather unevenly. ‘Heaven knows what she meant by it! Not the same, I think, that you do. Well! what I gave, I gave! No one shall ever say that I took it back. If it has been flung back to me, and is mine again, that’s a different matter. And that’s what I will find out.’

.

So that spring day ended, for Elizabeth, not so brightly as it had begun; but in a confusion of doubts and fears which, as before, were very little concerned with her own fortunes. Whatever nurse might read in Harold’s eyes when they were bent upon her darling’s face, Elizabeth herself had never said, in her own heart’s most secret depths, that Harold might, if he were

free, come to care for her more than ever he had cared for Alicia Colvin.

The question of paramount importance was whether his happiness and life were to be shipwrecked through his truth and loyalty. Was it likely that the girl who might take him would 'decline upon' young Cavenham? or was it likely that, taking him, she could make him happy?

Elizabeth feared not; but happily for herself she was too young and untried to foresee possible dangers and complications in the future, any more than Harold had done in his one-idea'd, high-minded stupidity.

The dowager Mrs. Malreward merely smiled, in an inscrutable manner, between two whiffs of her short black pipe, when they told her that her grandson had returned safe and sound.

‘What did I tell you?’ she asked, with grim triumph, and showed no relief or excitement. Perhaps by her own ways and means she had all along had information as to Harold’s eccentric movements, and had known of his whereabouts and his safety, though she had not chosen to relieve the anxiety of the rest otherwise than by oracular utterances in which they put small confidence.

Her demeanour was a great contrast to that of Harold’s aunts and step-mother, who were more moved and rejoiced at his return than he had at all expected.

It is to be feared that he had forgotten all about them, but for a vague idea that they would be glad to see Phil in his place; and when he re-appeared, almost as unexpectedly as he had vanished, he imagined that he should be consulting their feelings

by not seeming to expect a welcome. He was touched, and a good deal disconcerted, by the almost repentant warmth of their congratulations, and their efforts to make up to him for the hardships and dangers which they supposed him to have gone through.

But it was not to them that he gave a full account of his wanderings, but sitting in his old place on the rug at his grandmother's feet, with his head leaning against her knee, and her withered hand straying over his thick dark curls—far too closely cropped, now and always, to please her.

To her, in that curious out-spoken impassive fashion which they always dropped into, as if by nature, when together, he told more than he had to anyone else; much that would inevitably have shocked Eliza-

beth, much that Mr. Walrond would not have understood.

She understood, that old crone with the fine wrinkled features, and eyes that seemed by turns bright and dim, as if the light of life flickered within, while still burning strongly. She smiled grimly while the young man spoke of his schemes of vengeance, but shook her head. It did not please her that he should have come so near to forfeiting his name and place for ever. But neither did it altogether please her when he told how he had abandoned those schemes. Evidently, but for the risk, she would have preferred that he should have carried the matter through ! And when Harold confessed how he had forgiven his enemy upon his death-bed, she sighed with real regret, and told him that he was but half a Rom, after all.

Her own daughters, not to mention her daughter-in-law, would have been shocked if they had heard her. Harold was not shocked ; but perhaps it did him no harm to see the wild, essentially Pagan side of his own nature thus plainly caricatured before him. He could sympathise, to a certain extent, with what she demanded of him ; but he was not sorry that he had not gratified her !

‘ Did I not tell you how it would be ? ’ she asked, triumphantly. ‘ Trouble, and a great danger, and then a long and prosperous life-line ? Will you say again that your father’s old mother cannot tell you true ? ’

‘ I never said so ! ’ he answered, with half-affected indifference, looking into the glowing fire where she seemed to read so much, though possibly more of the past

than of the future, after all. ‘Tell me, grandmother, is it really the stars, or the lines, or what not, that you speak from? Or do you only feel, and guess, a little better than the rest of us?’

He half expected that she would be angry, but perhaps it would have been hard for him to anger her, in the first joy of his return. She only laughed—a toothless, elfish laugh of conscious power and wisdom.

‘What does it matter, as long as I know?’ she said. ‘I told you, and it came true. I knew that all would be well with you in the end. Master of Alston Crucis, or a king among our own people—and who knows which would be best? Not I, after all these years! You have chosen, and you will marry the fair-faced lady—if the lines run true—and not a gipsy lass, after all.’

‘You said—there were—two,’ said the young man, very slowly, with a mocking accent that did not sound quite genuine.

‘Not for you to marry, foolish lad! The first—her line touches yours, crosses it, and parts again. She was never meant to live and die by your side.’

‘Not if I choose to have it so, in spite of lines and anything else?’

Again she laughed, in that uncanny fashion.

‘You will choose what is to be your fate, as every man must! Be content! You shall have a fair sweetheart; and she shall love you better than the other one.’

‘And shall I love her?’

He spoke still in that would-be mocking tone, and for all answer she put her dark, withered hand under his chin and

turned his face to hers, studying it with somewhat embarrassing scrutiny; then dropped her hand with a grim, contemptuous chuckle, as of an expert asked to solve a problem too simple to be worth consideration.

‘When you marry,’ she said, after a moment, ‘the present madam will have to take herself off, I suppose?’

‘I suppose so,’ answered Harold, after a disconcerted pause. ‘But she will want to take Phil with her, and that won’t please me.’

‘Ay! The lad’s a good lad, and had little wish to step into your shoes and take your place, whatever his mother might wish for him. He’ll do well, and I wish him well; but not as master of Crucis! Will my daughters have to flit?’

‘It depends upon——’ began the young man, and checked himself, half-angrily, colouring and frowning. ‘They will do as they please, I hope,’ he went on, in quite a different tone.

‘Ah! I shall not flit, Harold, my lad! You’ll have to give the old woman a place by the chimney-corner till she dies; but it’ll not be long.’

‘The house is yours, and any part of it you choose,’ he answered, simply. ‘And I hope it may be for a long time still.’

‘Not long, my lad—not long. Every night I dream that I have a baby in my arms—not you, my lad, though you lay there oft enough—but your father, that went to his grave before me. I know what that means. As for a welcome here, being your father’s and your grandfather’s son, I suppose you think you can answer

for your wife, even before you have wedded her?’

‘My marriage is—uncertain enough,’ said Harold, his face darkening. ‘I will answer for myself, and that will be sufficient, where you are concerned.’

‘Like enough—like enough! As for uncertain, there’s nothing certain but death; but I know what I know. Mind! I must lie beside your father and grandfather in the churchyard at Alston St. Denis. In the vault, where my place is, as your grandfather’s lawful wife. I would as soon have lain under the grass, without a great pile of stone between me and the sunshine and the rain; but I’ll not give up my rightful place to anyone! I know where most of our people lie, and many a mile have I tramped behind a coffin—ay! and helped to bear it when my

turn came—to bring one of us home to those that were there before him. But I'll not lie with them.'

She was silent a moment, looking first into the fire, and then down at Harold's profile as he sat motionless at her feet.

'Have you made it up with our people, in your new fancy for making peace with everyone?' she asked at last.

'After a fashion! Some of them helped me well, and would have done more if I had wished it.'

'That's well! They must follow me to the grave, wherever they may be, when my time comes. And keep friends with them; Harold, my lad—keep friends with them, whatever you do. Your father never loved them—never knew them as you and I do; and so he made my brother Gabe his enemy.'

‘ He was very good to my great-uncle—
I know that !’

‘ Ay ! But give a Rom a gold sovereign
and a rough word, and he remembers the
rough word and forgets the sovereign.
Your father gave them all rough words
enough in his young days, when he was
hot of temper, and they remember them
still. Many things might have been dif-
ferent, both with you and with him, but
for that.’

‘ Will and Joe Herne both did their best
for me, anyhow. I shall not forget them.’

‘ Will they get into trouble over that
matter, when the lawyers have thrashed it
out to their own content ?’

‘ I hope not ! Not if I can help it.’

‘ Don’t trouble yourself about Joe, any-
way. He knows what the inside of a
jail is like, and he is as well inside as out.’

‘Possibly! But the man who was really guilty being dead and gone, there will not be much disposition to be hard upon his tools.’

‘Dead and gone!’ she echoed, with a flash of her sunken eyes. ‘Ay! but too easy a death. Not such a death as I would have given him if I had had my will. My son died first—my Philip—that might have been alive yet but for him. And you forgave him!’

‘Yes, I forgave him,’ answered Harold, with a little shudder. ‘He did what he could to atone, and because it was so little one could not help but pity him. Be content! his punishment is in wiser hands than ours. Tenderer hands, too, I think; but I don’t believe he is let off, any more than the rest of us need look or wish to be.’

The return to his old life, and the prospect of an ending to his other troubles and uncertainties, had left Harold far less sure of his own feelings and future than his grandmother professed to be.

It seemed to him indeed that he had hardly realised till then all that had happened on that memorable day when Alicia gave him his dismissal. It had done its share towards making him reckless and desperate; half-mad, for the time, between scorn of the past and indifference as to the future; but so much beside had come and gone that not till now had he had time to feel how much love and anger still remained. The wound was only seared, not healed, and he found it out when he stood once more in the familiar drawing-room at Netherfold. The delicate, indefinite scent that always hung about

that room,—and, so far as he knew, about no other place in the world—seemed to creep into his heart and brain, and waken there what memories it pleased.

He did not love her, this girl at whose disposal he was going to place himself. He had put her to too hard a test, perhaps ; but she had failed, and he ‘never forgave,’ except in a very limited sense, and after an effort great enough to kill love.

But also he ‘never forgot,’ and it was little more than a year since, in this very room, paradise had seemed to open its gates to him. There in the garden, in the long summer evenings, they had sat together, he and a beautiful ghost over whom his heart still yearned, who was not the woman who had failed him in his need.

‘Could’st thou but be as thou hast been!’ Alston Crucis, and all the sweet certainties of life, so lately regained, would not have been too great a price to pay for that: to make these golden dreams as true as they had been sweet; to bring back one of those lost golden hours, and the faith that had died with them.

A light step was behind him, and he turned. There she stood—the beautiful ghost—more beautiful than ever; with a faint half-smile on her lips, and eyes with a hint of sadness in their depths.

‘I am very glad to see you,’ she said. ‘No one in the neighbourhood has been more pleased than we have to hear that you have got your own again. I am glad to have an opportunity to tell you so.’

She did not ask him to sit down, or try in any way to show that they met now as

they had often done before, in easy intimacy. But she stood before him, still and apparently unmoved as a beautiful statue, like one of those queens among woman-kind who deal with men's hearts, right or wrong, unquestioned, as they choose.

‘It is very kind of you,’ he answered, slowly. ‘All the more kind because—when we parted last—I spoke to you hastily, as perhaps I had no right to speak.’

If Harold had not been a good deal of a boy still, with something of a boy's slight hardness in matters of sentiment, mingled with a boy's blundering, chivalrous quixotry, he would never have come there that day upon such an errand.

He began to realise that fact as their eyes met; to realise that it behoved him to be very careful how his offer was made,

not lest it should be accepted, but lest it should be such as would be impossible to accept, an insult to the woman he had once loved.

‘Hastily?’ said Miss Colvin, with the same slow smile. ‘No, I do not remember that you were hasty—or I.’

‘I set you free that day. It was—the only thing to be done. And perhaps I left you no choice but to accept your freedom. But—do you wish to keep it now? It was to ask you that I came here to-day; the first day that I could speak with certainty as to my future.’

‘I understand,’ she said; ‘you would not come back to me until you were certain.’

Harold bit his lip and was silent, looking down. What, in truth, was there to say but this, ‘I did love you once!’ And

she might take her cue, and answer, with that veiled hint of reproach in her tone, 'Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so!'

Echoes of passionate love-vows, spoken in this very room, seemed to shame his coldness now. And yet his heart was cold, and there was no fanning those white ashes into flame again. With some men the renewed perception of her beauty—beauty such as one seldom sees—and the little touch of coldness and reproach in her manner, would have gone far to waken love again. Perhaps even Harold felt his pulses quickened by the spell of perfect form and colour, by curve of waist and damask of cheek, in a way that a woman may be aware of, but can never quite understand. But not sufficiently to blot out the past, however he might plead

with her that it might be forgotten. Some men might be facile enough to forget the cavernous hollow of the Ellewoman's back when once her lovely face was turned again towards them, but not all.

‘Sit down,’ she said, suddenly, ‘and tell me all that you have been doing. Such strange stories have reached us. I could not believe them all, even of you.’

‘You can hardly have heard anything more strange than the truth,’ he answered. ‘Do you mean that you will not trust me and take me until you have had a full account of those doings of mine?’

‘No, not that.’

‘Then—It was all a mistake!—It seems now like a dream. Let us look on it as a dream, and think that we have never parted. I said once that I would not ask you to marry me until

my father's name was cleared. It is done now, and I come to ask you to be my wife. Alicia—— !'

His voice shook a little, and so did the hand that he held out to her. He would not play a part, any more than he would insult her by not seeming to want what he asked for ; but it was the yearning of memory over the past that supplied the passion that was lacking now. Against his own judgment, against reason, he was pleading with her to give him back his illusions, to restore that past which the gods themselves cannot restore.

And she misjudged him, as the cleverest of women will at times.

' I told you once that I had resolved to marry a rich man,' she said, looking at him with one long, considering glance, and then down to the carpet at her feet, ' and you

will be rich now, I hear; richer than at one time seemed probable?’

‘I have more to offer you than I had a year ago,’ answered Harold, almost eagerly; ‘and it shall all be at your feet. You shall do what you choose, and go where you will. I will be a great man for your sake, if it is possible, if you will show me how.’

Did he lay such stress upon what he *could* give because of that ever-deepening perception of what was his to give no longer? Again, perhaps, Alicia misunderstood him, as she sat, deep in thought, with lips compressed and calm, grave eyes cast down.

‘I believe it fully, but I could not marry you,’ she said at last. ‘I am sorry, for I think I care for you as much as I could care for anyone: but now you know how little that is, I will not marry you!’

‘ You will not ? ’

‘ No ! I would do it, as things are, if you loved me less, for then you would be satisfied with what I could give you. But now you would never be satisfied, any more than I could ever give you more—and I have liked you just too well for that ! ’

‘ Could you not give me more ? ’

‘ I think not. I think I was not made to care very much for anyone, or, if I did, do you think you would ever believe in me ? Do I not know that I had my chance, and missed it—that day when you came to me and told me that you were ruined ? ’

‘ We could agree to forget that day. ’

‘ Could we ? Could we do it ? After all, it was true. I am not ashamed of having spoken according to my nature. But you were ashamed for me ; I read it in your eyes. ’

She was looking him full in the face now, with more pride than shame in her own; her beautiful blue eyes with an angry spark in them, like lightning in a cloudless evening sky. Splendid, almost insolent, in its beauty, her face seemed to dare any man to think of such trifles as moral qualities, to mock him as a Puritan for demanding anything more than such peerless flesh and blood. And Harold looked at her a moment, half-fascinated, half-repelled, and took his eyes away again, repulsion gaining the upper hand. He *had* been ashamed for her, and he was ashamed still, thinking of another face, not so beautiful, and the soul that had looked at him through those other eyes.

Quick as thought Alicia had read his change of expression, and read it this time aright.

‘ You spoke just now of giving me my freedom,’ she said. ‘ Are you sure that if you had felt yourself perfectly free, in honour, you would have been here to-day? . . . Well, if it is in my hands, I give it back to you—and in your heart you thank me for it, even now.’

In the churchyard at Alston St. Denis, where we began, there to end.

The tiny grey lichens and green moss-velvet have begun to creep over Squire Philip’s name on the great altar-tomb; and those who love him let them grow. They are no fair type, as yet, of that growth of ‘ dim forgetfulness,’ that creeps over most names once inscribed on such a record. And the dead man’s son, having cleared that name in the sight of all men, can afford to let time soften the grim new-

ness of those carven letters, as he softened all the rest in their day.

Again it is an October day, nearly two years since that day in late October when Philip Malreward was laid among the dust of his fathers. And again his two sons are standing beside his grave, having unlocked the gateway in the tall spiked railing and entered the little enclosure where the Malrewards lie altogether.

Beside them stands Mr. Walrond, looking thoughtfully down upon his old friend's name; and outside, upon a low, flat tombstone, sits Elizabeth, tracing the worn inscription with the handle of her riding-whip, and looking dreamily away across the wooded valley to where Crucis shows grey amongst its reddening beeches.

Poor old Mr. Lucas, the rector of St. Denis, was not slow to make the *amende*

honorable to his late squire's memory, when everyone else did the same. He apologised to Harold, after a fashion ; and the young man stretched his generosity to the point of forgiving him, though not very heartily. But still every Sunday morning his favourite bay carried him across country to Deerhurst, crossing hedge and ditch in a way that somewhat scandalised the neighbourhood, even though the church was his goal. Of late, however, the good neighbours had begun to think that they knew the reason of this preference for Deerhurst, and to smile over it in kindly significant fashion.

One indirect consequence of it was that Harold must make a special pilgrimage sometimes to visit his father's grave, since he no longer passed, Sunday after Sunday, along the path that led beside the Malre-

ward burying-place up to the old church-door.

And on this day there was a special reason, apart from the anniversary that was drawing so near, and Phil's brief holiday and visit home. The old grand-dame had issued an edict that Harold should measure her husband's tomb, and see if there was room for her name below his ; and the young man as usual humoured her.

Not that even yet there was anything beyond the fact of her eighty-odd years to set her on arranging her last worldly affairs. But now and then she grew prophetic as to her own end, as one may safely do at eighty-six ; and was more impatient than flattered at being contradicted.

There was a tacit resolve among the county neighbours to atone for the wrong

they had done Philip Malreward by attending in full force the obsequies of his mother, whose very existence they had taken upon trust for nearly forty years. And so, by the irony of fate, the proudly-respectable families of the shire were to attend an old gipsy-woman to the grave, side by side with her wandering kith and kin; and her aspirations after a grand funeral were likely to be doubly gratified!

Meanwhile, Harold was locking the iron gate after him, and joining Elizabeth on the tombstone beside the yew-tree, while the other two strolled away to look for a curious epitaph that Phil professed to have seen.

‘There will be room to have it as she wishes,’ he said, ‘but I rather wonder she should wish it. I won’t lie in there at all, when my time comes. I much prefer this homely green turf, with a few lingering

harebells in it, and tufts of wild camomile. I wonder that any of our people can be reconciled to so much masonry.'

'Do you mean your grandmother's people?'

'Of course! Some day I will show you where most of the Hernes are buried; in a little churchyard in the next county. What made them fix on that place, in all their wanderings, I don't know. But they will put themselves to a great deal of trouble to lay their friends there, and would expect to "walk," I believe, if somebody did not do the same for them when their time came.'

'My father does not quite like to hear you speak of them as "your" people.'

'No? Well, I was brought up to do it. You know I never want to vex him if I can help it. Does it vex you?'

‘No!’

‘You don’t care enough about me to be vexed at anything of that sort?’

Elizabeth made no answer, only looked at him with a quaint, side-long glance and a little deepening of colour on her delicate face, that was more womanlike than two years ago, yet quite as like some softly-tinted flower. Then she looked away again, across the valley, and Harold’s eyes followed hers.

‘Crucis looks well this afternoon, doesn’t it?’ he said. ‘Elizabeth! will you come there?’

He held out his hand, as if he meant to lead her, then and there, across the sunny autumn fields.

‘Now?—this moment?’ she asked, half wilfully misunderstanding him.

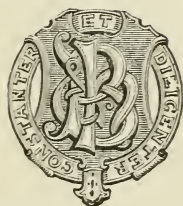
‘If you like! *I* have been waiting—I am

afraid to say how long. But I am very patient, though it is hard work sometimes —I will wait till you are ready. For when you come I will never let you go again !'

THE END.

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